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Create to Live:
Perceptions of Contemporary Art in Reality TV

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Create to Live:
Perceptions of Contemporary Art in Reality TV

by

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Dedication

To my friends, my family, and every teacher who ever encouraged my love of art.

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Abstract

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Within the field of art education, there has been little to no research into the knowledge afforded by discourses around popular culture, especially those specific to reality television, into how the public conceptualizes contemporary art and artists. This kind of foundational knowledge is critical to our own development and evolution as a field as we learn how to most effectively reach our students and advocate best for the value of arts in education. Through an investigation of the television program *Work of Art: The Next Great Artist*, I asked: is the perception of contemporary art and practice altered by the lens of popular culture and, specifically, the reality television format? Is this an entryway to a broader dialogue about art's value in the 21st century and to young individuals' lives and careers?

Results from this study were threefold. First, results pointed to a pattern of progressively nuanced insight and descriptive talk, indicated alternative access to art's interpretability through the lens of popular culture. Talk in the focus groups functioned as

a way for participants to perform access to interpretive authority over subjects of contemporary art to varying degrees of success, whether that meant adopting art terminology or modeling the language of judges and artist-contestants.

Secondly, analysis displayed the discursive work involved in the meaning-making around understanding the artist as a figure, as a myth, and as a profession. Participants' interactional speech performed a balancing act between critically examining the competing discourses of the artist—as contestant and creative laborer—and an understanding of who they are and their own identity in relation to the character of the artist.

Lastly, analysis uncovered situated meaning of art and its value, where participants conducted a critical negotiation of what is and what was not art unfettered by lack of art historical knowledge of access to art's interpretability.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This study examined how *Work of Art: The Next Great Artist*, a competition-based reality television show featuring contemporary visual artists, functions as a framework for evaluating the values of contemporary art within the context of popular culture. According to a recent American Time Use survey, "Watching TV was the leisure activity that occupied the most time (2.8 hours per day), accounting for more than half of leisure time, on average, for those age 15 and over" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

Since the 1950s, television viewing has taken on increasing prominence in popular culture and therefore brought upon increased academic scrutiny of its texts, symbols, and audience. As a form of media, television has been attacked for its consumerist impulses, policed as a means of curbing violence and obscenity, and capitalized upon by the advertising industry. There is not so much the question of whether television has assumed an important social role as much as it is a question of how that role functions and with whom. Television, as a mode of popular culture, has taken control of not just how we choose to spend our leisure time but how we contextualize the events and characters we encounter in our day-to-day lives. Academic attention to the link between television and learning has primarily focused on educational broadcasting and the negative effects of violence on children. Sociologists have long studied television and the "effect" on its audience, somewhat to the detriment of examining the relationship between the text and the audience and the discourses perpetuated by this relationship. As a field, art education has recognized the influence of popular culture in education and how to utilize these texts in the classroom (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Freedman & Wood, 1999; Lanier, 1990; Tavin, 2003; Tavin, 2005; Wilson,

2003), but further attention should be paid to how television audiences are informally learning about art outside the classroom and how that, in turn, affects the classroom and art learning. But in most instances, popular television programming and reality television programming, in particular, are universally shunned as a site for learning. Part of the reason for that pertains to distinctions of taste, which, as Bourdieu has written, also define distinctions of value. Popular programming, and reality television in specific, have been panned as part of low brow culture. And yet, the popularity of reality television, especially among a younger generation of Americans, should warrant further study about what kinds of informal learning occur for this age group through the viewing of reality television shows. To that effect, this study focused on the ways that reality television, as an aspect of visual culture, plays a role in the construction of contemporary art's image in public opinion.

CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

The following question formed the core focus of this study:

How do the portrayals of contemporary artists and art-making in reality television, specifically the show *Work of Art: The Next Great Artist*, affect viewer perceptions of contemporary art? Similarly, how do viewers regard themselves within the narrative of the show and its portrayal of contemporary art and practice?

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many of the difficulties that we, as art educators, face in the survival and development of the field stem from our inability to effectively communicate the role of an arts education in student and lifelong learning. This ineffectuality is intensified by the

fact that the field does not do enough to consider how forms of visual culture can be utilized as advocacy tools, particularly in regards to the importance of studying contemporary art and material culture. I believe that popular culture wields a powerful influence on the perception of contemporary art and practice to policy makers, parents, and the community. The rationale behind investigating the framework of popular culture lies in the notion that to teach and advocate effectively we must first understand how the television medium influences public opinion and understanding of contemporary art. Research that investigates the perception of the field through the lens of popular culture would inform pedagogical evolution and how we advocate for the field.

MOTIVATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Personal Motivation

The point of entry for my thesis research begins with my own experience as an artist and is bolstered by my belief in policy-making as an integral component of social change. I come to art education from the perspective of a person that has grown emotionally, socially, and critically with the help of art-making. I have come to think of sculpture and installation as my medium of choice, and it is one that truly asks much from a person. The research and multi-layered meaning-making that goes into each piece requires work, feedback, and critical inspection on the part of the artists and the community of other artists around them. It is the process of making art, and what students can learn from it, that impelled me towards art education and which drives me today to define the value of a visual arts education to a broader audience.

For all of my enthusiasm, my interactions with friends and family about contemporary art and installation quite often end in an exasperated kerfluffle, whereby they have nothing left to say but, "I just don't get it." And the dialogue stops. There is an immovable obstacle between us, a dialectical bridge effectively burned. I am repeatedly concerned by this sequence of events. Most people I know who love art want nothing but to talk about it ad nauseum. But in contemporary art—which is often created and viewed through a postmodern lens—many times there are limited points of entry for that dialogue. There are those involved with art and the art world, and those who feel and define themselves as outside of it, who are frustrated by the lack of descriptive text at a museum exhibit or an untitled piece. I empathize with this self-description, but I want nothing more than to find creative ways to combat it. I am invested with how we, as art educators, can demystify contemporary art to a wider audience. How can we engage disaffected or frustrated audiences on their own terms, through popular art, visual culture and television, to disarm the theory and practice behind contemporary art?

In 2010, Bravo television paired up with producers, Pretty Matches and Magical Elves, to create the reality-television show *Work of Art: The Next Great Artist*. In this program, the content of a show was very personal to my own lived experience. I am both a self-prescribed fan of popular television and an artist. As Bravo put it: "*Work of Art: The Next Great Artist* will bring together fourteen aspiring artists to compete for a solo show at the prestigious Brooklyn Museum and a generous cash prize" (Bravo Media LLC., 2010). Bravo also professed that the new show would "[bring] fine art dialogue to the forefront of pop culture." The contestants were contemporary artists revealing and talking through their process on camera in a way that felt like the stylized, *Reader's Digest* version of PBS favorite, *Art 21*. It was flashy, the artists were characters, the action catered to drama—in short, it was addictive. And to that end it was also perceived

as a threat by what might be called "the art world" or those that comprise it. Perhaps this reaction stems from the way the art world and its institutions have cultivated an image that does not cast the artist as an accidental genius, but as studious ciphers that must continually work at their craft in order to achieve notoriety. If there is anything that reality television has been accused of—often justifiably—it is the cheapening of success. A reality show about contemporary art casts suspicions on the difficulty of success in the art world. Additionally, either because of market influence or the intent of producers, I found there were many problematic aspects that revealed latent neoliberal and elitist ideologies that relied on notions of cultural capital in the show design and structure. But from the response the show received online, on blogs, other social media channels, and in high ratings that built up over the course of the season and culminating in the season one finale, it was still considered enough of a success in its first season to warrant the call for a second (TV by the Numbers, 2014; Web, 2014).

So, through an investigation of this program, I asked: is the perception of contemporary art and practice altered by the lens of popular culture and, specifically, the reality television format? Is reality television an entryway to a broader dialogue about art's value in the 21st century and to young individuals' lives and careers? For some time I have been interested in art, policy, and communications, so I am easily captured by the possibilities of what the success of *Work of Art* and similar popular culture mediums could mean for art advocacy.

Professional Motivation

The field of art education is at a turning point. Art education is called upon to branch out into new avenues of influence that might exist outside the classroom or the

museum, or at the very least these institutions need to engage the concerns and interests of a broader community. With funding on the local and national level being cut or leveled off, art educators and advocates need to become creative about the ways they reach new audiences and learners. Visual culture has expanded to include all strata of things in our cultural milieu, including television (Mirzoeff, 1999). Research in media has already established the influence of television on the lives of youth in K-12 schooling. In her book, *Teaching Visual Culture*, Kerry Freedman (2003) points to research that shows that:

> Approximately one third of the early adolescents in the United States watch five or more hours of television a day. People in the United States have more televisions and video recorders and spend more time advertising per capita than any other nation. More children watch a nationally broadcast television program than are taught from the same written school curriculum. In a sense, television has become the national curriculum and the media now provide edu-tainment. (p.142)

The intentions and representation of contemporary art and artists shown on television through reality TV has become a part of "edu-tainment." Instead of opposing this development outright, I would like to understand the ways art educators can either capitalize on this media through an analysis of positive and negative perceptions, or foster a more comprehensive awareness of the Barthes-type "myths" that surround contemporary art practice and artists. My research question focuses on one particular television show that explores the process of meaning-making for artists, curators, critics, and gallery owners. Within a discussion of the show and its characters, I'm interested in unpacking the relationship between young adult's professional goals, their identity work (Turner, 2004), and popular culture.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted under the provisions of an exploratory study into the perceptions of contemporary art through emerging adult discourses held within a focus group environment and communicated through survey responses. Specifically, qualitative analysis of surveys, individual and focus group interviews were completed using a grounded theory approach that sought to develop working theories through an iterative process of pattern recognition and discourse analysis. A more complete discussion of the methodology utilized in this study is found in Chapter 3.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Contemporary Art: Works produced by artists who are living or have produced work in the twenty-first century.

Emerging Adults: Utilizing Arnett's (2004) definition, a developmental period between the ages of 18 and 25 years defined by a new sense of independence, instability, and freedom to experiment.

Reality Television: I am using the definition put forth by Nabi, Biely, Morgan & Stitt in 2003, that reality television includes all "programs that film real people as they live out events (contrived or otherwise) in their lives, as these events occur" (p. 304).

Interpretive Repertoires: "Broadly discernable clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech often assembled around metaphors or vivid images drawn on to characterize and evaluate actions or events" (Potter & Wetherell, 1995, p. 89).

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

For a manageable, internally valid case study with a rich data set that is representative of the participants' perceptions and negotiations of the content, I collected data from only a small group of participants. As a consequence, one of the limitations of the study is its scope. It is not generalizable, but offers an approach to future studies.

Participants (two male, two female) were culled from the undergraduate classes at The University of Texas at Austin to reach a participant group within the target psycho-developmental stage of "emerging adulthood" (Arnett, 2004). Findings are specific to this age group and developmental category. Focus groups were heterogeneous, consisting of both males and females, because the subject matter would not make any of the participants uncomfortable and I hoped to solicit a variety of perspectives and knowledge (Stewart, 1990). However, a heterogeneous design affects group dynamic within focus groups (Verdi, 1991), so there is always the consideration of whether homogeneous groups would solicit a different set of data. A heterogeneous group was chosen to best reflect real world conversations about television content. This study had limited generalizability to a wider population, but nevertheless provides suggestions toward the design of a larger study.

Benefits to the Field of Art Education

As stated previously, I am committed to the notion that to teach and advocate effectively for contemporary art and visual arts as a career and a site for cultural enrichment, we must understand how popular culture currently influences public opinion and perception of contemporary art. At its core, this notion is rooted in the understanding that popular media shapes public opinion and that, likewise, public opinion shapes media messages. By understanding the conversation that is already happening between these two, art educators can find ways to insert ourselves, challenge or draw attention to the kinds of images and messages being read. Additionally, knowledge of public opinion informs strategic advocacy to a variety of audiences, including policy-makers, parents, and emerging adults.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced the subject of my investigation into the public discourses around contemporary art and my approach utilizing popular culture. I have also outlined the central research questions of this study, problem statement, motivations, methodology, definition of terms, limitations of the study, and benefits to the field of art education. Moving forward, this thesis is structured in the following way. Chapter 2 covers some of the philosophical underpinnings of this kind of research and the broader context for the research among a few interdisciplinary fields, including communication studies, cultural studies, critical theory, media studies, and television and film theory. Within this apparatus, special attention is made to providing the background on television studies, reality television as a site for research, and the influence of television on emerging adults. Chapter 3 introduces the methodology I used for my research and rationale behind the use of focus groups, discourse analysis, and grounded theory.

Chapter 4 presents the data that I collected, including summaries of initial interviews with participants and classifications for baseline understanding of contemporary art, and results from analysis of that data out of which certain discourse negotiations emerged. Lastly, Chapter 5 concludes the research study and offers a discussion of future possible research that emerges from this study, as well as some implications of this research for the field of art education.

Chapter 2: Review of Pertinent Literature

Central to my investigation is the question of how portrayals of contemporary artists and art-making on television, a dominant medium for current popular culture, affected viewer perceptions of contemporary art as a field and artists as professionals to be modeled by emerging adult viewers. The question of popular culture's position within art education pedagogy is not new, but it is a discourse that has been evolving with technology's presence and permanence in the classroom. Additionally, the presence of multi-platform screens and increased engagement with social forms of online media for youth and emerging adults makes it of increasing import to our educational approach and contemporary practice. To that end, in contextualizing my study, I have reviewed relevant literature on the influence of television and its history in visual culture. The following sections make up this literature review: (a) Television and Its Influence, (b) Reality Television, and (c) Emerging Adults and Television Influence.

TELEVISION AND ITS INFLUENCE

Principal to a study of the effect of a television show would be literature on television to inform theory and research. Since the 1950s, television has assumed an increasingly prominent place in our cultural lives. Television or TV's sociocultural power can no longer be contested in a world where its prevalence is so profound and prolific. In a recent American Time Use Survey conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, it was noted that those aged 15 and over spent 2.8 hours, or on average half of their leisure time per day, watching TV (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Further, Nielson notes that 95.2% of households in the U.S. possess at least one television "receiving traditional TV signals via broadcast, cable, DBS or Telco, or having a broadband Internet connection"

(Nielson, 2015). The informal discussions and learning that take place surrounding television programming both shapes and is shaped by our evolving cultural norms and conventions. Due to its popularity and ubiquity, television has sparked the interest and debate of many fields, from psychology and sociology to media and cultural studies and communications research. Each is invested in the role and function of television in a different, significant way. The study of television and its theoretical underpinnings has been taken up in earnest over the last two decades. But the philosophical underpinnings of television studies and its precursors can be found in the work of semiotics, critical theorists, Marxists, cultural studies theorists, and film studies scholars. The work of authors in these fields has set the stage for some of television studies' most basic, overarching questions: What is television? How does it function in our culture? These are questions that become lightning rods for my own study.

The role of television, from the earliest studies of the medium, including those criticisms from Lee De Forest in the 1940s to Horace Newcomb in the 1970s, have examined its position in society and culture and its ability to affect attitudes and behaviors. In as much as critical theory and the Frankfurt School play a role in understanding television and its function, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the work of Adorno and Horkheimer, make clear the need for examining the products of the "culture industry," including popular forms such as television, in the larger critique of mass culture (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972). The influence of the school persisted through the late 20th century, as Newcomb (2000) writes about the history of developments within the field:

> The choice to examine these 'inferior' or 'unappreciated' forms was motivated by a number of concerns. Philosophically, scholars in this movement often felt the

> works they wished to examine were more indicative of larger cultural preferences, expressive of a more 'democratic' relationship between works and audiences than the 'elite' works selected, archived, and taught as the traditional canon humanistically valued forms of expression.
>
> Politically, these same impulses suggested that it was important to study these works precisely because their exclusion from canonical systems also excluded their audiences, devalued large numbers of citizens, or saddled them with inferior intellectual or aesthetic judgment. (p. 2)

The Frankfurt School set the stage for popular culture studies, but their work makes a somewhat dubious distinction between high and low culture, a point articulated by Doug Kellner in his contribution to *A Companion to Television* (2005). Hierarchies involving a sociology of taste create a false dichotomy, a criticism made by Bourdieu (1999). Cultural studies scholars would later cultivate theories on how popular culture influences societal perceptions through the ideologies it recapitulates to and discourses it draws upon. And contemporary research into television studies have shown that the kinds of discourses that television engenders contribute to the social construction of race, class, and gender (Bodroghkozy, 2003; Poindexter, Smith, & Heider, 2003; Xiaoquan & Gantz, 2003).

The more recent and expanded critical theory of Adorno forms the backbone of my theoretical point of view, which prioritizes the needs of real-world change on an individual basis and on a broader scale for advocacy of contemporary arts. More recent adaptations of Guy Debord's theories (a contemporary of Adorno) can be seen in the work of Paul Duncum (2001) who modernizes the society of the spectacle by articulating that, "The society of the spectacle refers to our tendency to turn our attitudes, beliefs, and values into images" (p. 106). Duncum and other contemporary advocates of visual culture recognize the exponential power of new technologies as creators of ever-more images

and tools for communication and culture. However, as visual culture embraces new technologies and crosses interdisciplinary boundaries, the work of media theorists, such as Marshall McLuhan, and visual culture's antecedent, cultural studies, play an increasingly larger role in the comprehension of visual culture's scope and theoretical underpinnings (Allen, 1992; Taylor & Harris, 2008).

Robert Allen, a preeminent theorist in the field of mass communication research, compiled a collection of essays that seek to puzzle out the nature of our relationship with television as an entertainment and educational medium. Less involved with the effects of television messages on children and adolescents specifically, Allen (1992) brings together authors that illustrate the modes by which dialogue about television informs more universal cultural conventions. Authors rely on theories of structuralism, post-structuralism, and postmodernism to ground their arguments and present television's effects as a symbol system that relies on a set of certain rules to produce meaning for viewing audiences. Among the topics, Allen's authors discuss the role of narratives, social constructions of identity, and the role of commodity culture in our relationship with television content. Where Allen becomes eminently relevant to the study at hand is in the intersection between identity work and the role of television. Likewise, John Corner's theoretical writing in *Critical Ideas in Television Studies* (1999) touches upon identity work in professional settings in the organ of cultural production between television as a "culturally constitutive" medium and the viewing audience (pp. 6-7). He makes the most salient argument about the shift in critical focus from "the individual viewer" to this more modern viewing of a highly engaged process of social construction. As a culturally constitutive medium, television is both shaped and shaping cultural meaning and values all while functioning as an "interpretive resource for viewing" (p. 6).

To that end, this research focused on trying to locate the circulation of meaning between culture, audience, and interpretive resource.

Reading Television, the seminal work by noted theorist John Fiske (1978) informs current television studies. His work, grounded in literary theory and semiotics, suggests that television audiences have the capability to meet the influence of the "text" of television, a relationship previously discounted when television viewing was seen as a one-directional transaction between consumer and consumed content. His work suggests an inverse relationship between the audience and the ideological authority of those texts that had not been considered previously. Audiences could, Fiske argues, create meanings of their own outside the text, sometimes in opposition to the ideological implications within the text. But Fiske's addition to television studies has never been more relevant than it is today within a Web 2.0 landscape where access to production is being re-envisioned and dialogue is taking place in new spaces by a broader set of producers. Fiske's theories had noted significance for how this research sees audience reception of a text seen as a "low culture" form.

Another significant author in the field is John Hartley, who emphasizes the pedagogical function of television use in our culture. Pedagogically, television has the capacity to reach a wider audience and change perceptions on a mass scale, sometimes provoking in audiences counter-opinions to ideological implications posed within the text. Television made its formal introduction into the field of art education through visual culture studies, which advocates for expanding the definition of art to include many forms of cultural expression. Proponents of visual cultural studies, including Nicholas Mirzoeff, criticize cultural studies for the tendency within the field to generalize, categorizing all art as artifacts of the cultural elite and influenced by dynamics of power. For Mirzoeff and other visual culture study advocates, this is a dated point of view that

does not take into account the full scope of what visual culture tries to understand. Mirzoeff advocates the synthesis of art history's historical background with the socially engaged approach of cultural studies (1999) in order to understand both historical context, however privileged, while examining cultural influence and function through a critical lens.

In the field of visual culture studies, Brent Wilson (2003) has considered the difficulties in expanding the content of art education curricula to include objects and conceptual concerns of the contemporary art world and its connection to popular culture artifacts in his article, "Of Diagrams and Rhizomes: Visual Culture, Contemporary Art, and the Impossibility of Mapping the Content of Art Education." Wilson highlights the role of youth as producers of culture and social identities, all of which are a part of a cycle of adaptation and change. Which is to say: messages transmitted through visual culture about contemporary art and practice are simultaneously reflecting the values and knowledge of an audience demographic and influencing that audience's perception of cultural content, harkening back to Corner's conception of television's role within culture.

All of the outlined theorists have provided fruitful possibilities for cultural studies and television studies as a field. But for the practical concerns of a research study, relevant literature must examine methodologies and audience research methods. This objective runs into a difficult debate within the field between active and passive audiences. Traditionally, audience research has been the purview of broadcasters and marketers, making its methods suspect to researchers not interested in how to monetize viewing preferences. In its most basic form, this earlier type of audience research that saw viewers as passive, relied on the quantitative research methodologies of theorists such as George Gerbner (1953) who developed cultivation analysis. Cultural studies

scholars have long divested themselves in discrediting the work of Gerbner for creating a system of analysis and research that places too much emphasis on the "effects" of television viewing on audiences, assuming the viewer or participant is a passive observer. An assumption believed to reiterate a power dynamic and narrative that situates show producers in active roles and viewers as simply passive consumers of that product. In a constructive amendment that bridges some of the interests between these two parties, Sonia Livingstone (1990) clarifies Gerbner's work:

> [Gerbner's] third innovation is to link studies of effects to an analysis of the programmes themselves, thus making explicit the stimulus which is supposed to affect the viewers without reducing that stimulus to a brief and isolated segment. Thus his independent variable--the meanings of the television programmes--are not undermined….Thus Gerbner claims that if we redefine 'effects' as indirect, gradual, generalised and symbolic, then television can be shown to have a consistent, though still small, effect on its viewers. (pp.16-17)

To Livingstone's point, research into audience reception can be made more transparent and, therefore, more reliable by linking together qualitative responses to explicit, quantitative analysis. If this study were to be expanded to a larger sample size, I may seek to use both quantitative and qualitative methods and a cultural studies approach to a brief analysis of the show content itself. For this investigation, however, I was concerned with what viewer responses denote in this specific context and what the process of meaning-making is for a discursive text like television.

REALITY TELEVISION

> The visual impact of photographic imagery may have a great deal to do with the belief that television is like real life. Students may understand fictional qualities of television when it is presented visually as fiction (as in science fiction), but

> they think of television as a window to the world when it comes to issues of identity and their own social life. (Freedman, 2003, p. 167)

If television alone offers students a window into the world, as Kerry Freedman suggests, then how has the creation and proliferation of reality television complicated meaning making within the television format? As it would seem, the "reality" of reality television has been complicated over its short history by audience familiarity with the genre and more critical understanding of its conventions.

The proliferation of reality television programming has often been blamed on economic factors and motivations. It is no secret that the production costs for reality TV are far lower than that of scripted or other entertainment programming. Low production values and non-scripted programming make it relatively inexpensive in comparison to its scripted peers. Scholar Glenn Getz has made note of the increase in news and information programming during the 1990s in his work in communication studies, which was also due in part to economic incentives. Getz (1994) notes that "television news is less expensive to produce than entertainment programming…is rich with topical possibilities, can maintain high ratings over time, is less vulnerable to financial negotiations with Hollywood studios, and satisfies an apparent public thirst for information" (pp. 2-3).

Reality TV's perceived rapid proliferation has positioned it, as a genre, as a product of low brow culture. and therefore trivial both culturally and educationally. The argument, following that logic, is that reality television is a symptom of the perceived social and moral failings of the current society. But reality TV is not a new trend in the entertainment industry, and elements of its format are derived from television news (as Getz describes), so to claim it as a new phenomenon is both misleading and misinformed. Annette Hill (2005) specifies in her work that reality TV is often a catch all term to

describe a genre that has developed and expanded to include a wide diversity of formats from infotainment to investigative formats, and from docu-soap/behind-the-scenes to talent competition formats (Hill, 2005). This expansion is not only a testament to the form's mass appeal, but also to its responsiveness to different cultural contexts. Further, the judgment leveled against reality TV amounts to a taste distinction that creates a false dichotomy between genres, much like the distinction made between television as a media form and other purveyors of culture (Bourdieu, 1999). Although she was exploring the gendered reception of soap operas and their audience, Christine Geraghty argues for a similar phenomenon happening with the reception of reality TV:

> Reality TV is constructed as being watched by those with poor taste: the uneducated and unsophisticated viewer. In this way, as Bourdieu (1984) documented extensively, taste is used to make distinctions, to mark out what, and who, is valued from what is not. Reality TV is read as working-class and female. Like soap operas, the other TV genre associated with working-class women, Reality TV is a devalued space. (Geraghty, 1990, p. 45)

To devalue the space of reality TV is also to discount the values and response of its biggest audience: youth. Murray and Ouellette (2009) provide an exceptional introduction to the advancements that reality TV has made in the field of new media. Through a collection of essays, the assembled authors chart the development of reality TV as a television study and media theory phenomenon. In addition, there is an extended discussion from Heather Hendershot (2009) about the particular idiosyncrasies in the reality TV format and what it reflects in terms of economic, cultural, viewing audience influence and how responsive it is to social realities. Specifically, a previous television show produced by Bravo, *Project Runway*, is analyzed in the context of what it means culturally about our view of the careers and work ethic of creatives. The author draws

attention to the kind of gambit inherent in the "competition" format of *Project Runway*, where “Good work is consistently rewarded, and bad work is punished. It is a workaholic’s dream world” (p. 247). But, as Hendershot would attest, there are two paradoxical storylines at work. The first is one where a snapshot of the American dream is ably performed: contestants work long hours with tight deadlines and small budgets, but they endure and are subsequently rewarded for their love of the craft. The second storyline reveals the influence of neoliberal marketplace demands which mandate a work ethic divorced from all other concerns, rewarding only production that is accepted institutionally—in this case represented by a panel of judges (Hendershot, 2009). Hendershot’s work was examined to better understand and bring context to how labor is currently represented in reality TV specific to creative professions. There is a sense from Hendershot’s work that the exploitative nature of this type of programming culturally sets the stage for a larger acceptance of exploitative practices towards creative professionals in the workplace.

Annette Hill (2005) examines the relationships that audiences have with reality TV as a popular mediator of factual content in her book *Reality TV – Audiences and Popular Factual Television*. Hill (2005) cites audience research in an explanation of reality TV’s prominence:

> One of the reasons the reality genre has been so powerful in the television market is that it appeals to younger adults in particular. For example, reality gameshows and talent shows in the USA are especially popular with young viewers who have watched reality shows in far bigger numbers than anything else on television and are the consumers most coveted by advertisers. (p. 5)

Throughout the text, Hill attempts to critically understand contemporary viewing audiences through a deliberate attention to their responses to reality TV as participants in

a research design. The intent behind her study is to illustrate how these responses reflect participants' real understanding of the world as they critically examine the actions and attitudes of the ordinary people they saw engaged in these reality programs. What Hill found was that participants' responses were influenced by the perceived constructions of the genre, the perceived degree of performance of the contestants, and a latent skepticism about the "reality" of the nonfiction medium. John Ellis (2003), too, has examined the complicated reading of and relationship with reality television as a "window to the world" (Freeman's words from earlier), arguing that the same types of questions that critics claim are missing from reality TV are the questions and conversations that surround its reception and dialogue, including "are these people typical?" and "are these really our values?" (Broadcast, "Big Debate Happening Everywhere but on TV," 2003, p. 11). These critical audience conversations are reflected in Hill's (2005) work that showed, "More resistant to content that was advertised and promoted as 'factual,' viewing audiences exhibited a higher level of critical thinking about the content and external influences of television production" (p. 26). Despite the fact that participants articulated a skepticism towards learning opportunities while watching reality TV, their ability to "see through" events, as Hill would say, to the apparatus behind their creation and criticize that production reveals possible opportunities to learn from reality TV as a genre.

Lastly, this study looks at two research studies that examine the reading of authenticity in reality television as a genre. Both investigations confront the common assumption of a passive audience by examining the audience engagement and finding that reality TV viewers engage in a "sophisticated negotiation of paradoxical elements" (Rose & Wood, 2005, p. 288). Of import with these studies for my research is the relationship between the audience negotiation of authenticity and the ability to identify with *people*

versus *characters* on a reality show. The research of Randall L. Rose and Stacy L. Wood roughly details a variety of consumer practices related to the seeking out and consumption of authenticity, and how they might be a response to a particular postmodern moment that prizes the "true" and the "authentic" as a way to reaffirm the value of the commonplace and forms of mass, popular culture. The results of their study point to viewer reception of reality TV as an interactive process, a negotiation of paradoxical elements, including "paradoxes of identification (beautiful people vs. "people like me"), situation (common goals vs. uncommon surroundings), and production (unscripted vs. necessary manipulation)" (Rose & Wood, 2005, p. 294). Rose and Wood's findings reveal that viewers are more aware of these paradoxical elements than previously thought, and the negotiation of meaning between the programming and the viewer is a part of a process of authentication.

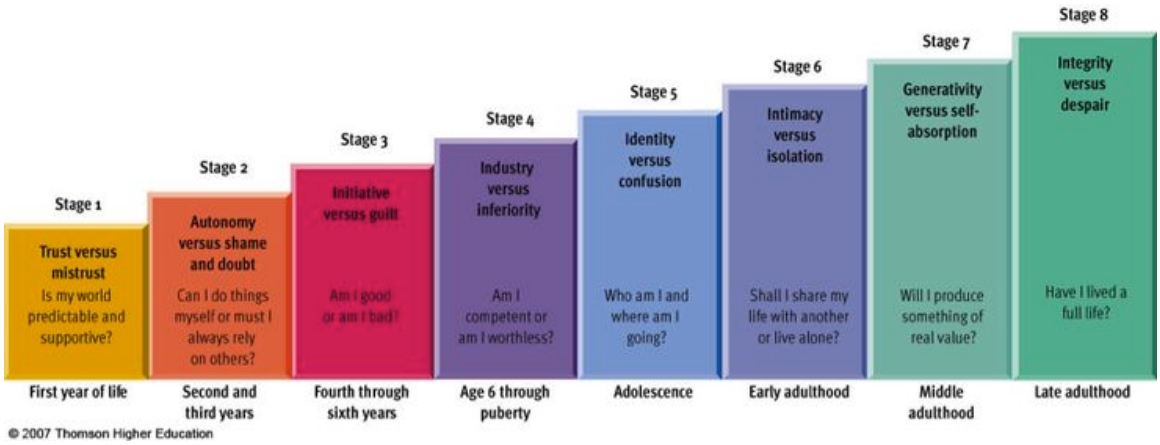
Where Wood and Rose focused on the process of consumption of authenticity, the research of Kim Allen and Heather Mendick (2012) is concerned with the implications of authentication on young people's negotiation of self-identity. Unlike Wood and Rose, Allen and Mendick cite the work of Ouellette (2009) and see the pursuit of authenticity in reality TV as a kind of byproduct of a larger pursuit of authenticity in our lives, a neoliberal project of self-actualization that demands individuals "engage in techniques of self-knowledge and self-examination to 'realize' their 'true' self" (Allen & Mendick, 2012, p. 461). Their study of how social class position influences young people's negotiations of authenticity in reality TV reaffirms the finding of Wood and Rose: that negotiation of paradoxes within the form contributes to both enjoyment and notions of authenticity. Where Allen and Mendick contribute to my understanding of the research subject is how viewers construct social class through reality TV texts as such representations are watched, discussed, and used as tools for meaning making.

EMERGING ADULTS AND TELEVISION INFLUENCE

Returning to the work of Heather Hendershot (2003), there is a double meaning at play in the title of the program studied here: *Work of Art*, which points to some of its cultural import. The first meaning is the product of artists' work, their works of art. But a secondary meaning, and more important one to my study, is the work, or the labor represented in the reality show context on behalf of contemporary artists, critics, gallerists, curators, and auctioneers. All these professions, and a few more, have their spotlight. If television is a cultural practice, as outlined by television studies' theorists, then the popular culture of television is where our conversations around class and work play out, where we police, negotiate, and subvert the boundaries of what is acceptable and valued. Television is not only for entertainment, but functions as a site for identity work and psychosocial development.

Erik Erikson, seminal psychologist and psychoanalyst, is best known for his theory of psychosocial development. As a theory, it describes eight stages of personality development from infancy to adulthood (Erikson, 1968).

Figure 1: Erik Erikson's Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development



The fifth stage, "Identity vs. Identity Confusion," describes a point in which adolescents attempt to situate themselves within society. Erikson believes that at work within the fifth developmental stage is a matching of cultural roles, skills, and current interests. Identity formation, then, can be described as a process of aligning previous experience and current social and cultural context.

Erikson was the first to situate identity formation within the context of psychosocial development, specifically the adolescent years. But as Jeffrey Megsen Arnett calls attention to, Erikson also "commented on the 'prolonged adolescence' typical of industrialized societies and the *psychosocial moratorium* granted to young people in such societies, 'during which the young adult through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society'" (Arnett, 2004, p. 9 citing Erikson, 1968, p. 150). Erikson expressed his theory of psychosocial development before some of the dramatic changes that have taken place in recent years, including a prolonged delay of marriage and family for the pursuit of higher education, which has been taken up in much greater numbers than during his time. Due to these developments, identity work itself has been reshaped by the freedom to experiment, including experimentation with different majors in college, various partners, and a range of career paths that take youth new places for diverse experiences. Erikson's theory anticipated these changes, as Arnett noticed, but he might never have predicted the extent to which the "psychosocial moratorium" of industrialized societies would take hold and develop into its own distinct developmental period.

Where once it was commonplace to have completed education, begun a stable career and family at age 21, young people of the same age today have not reached those traditional developmental milestones. Instead, young people are staying in school longer,

delaying marriage and parenthood, and taking a more prolonged amount of time to puzzle out their identity before choosing a vocation. Changes in our post-industrial lives have extended the transition to adulthood into the late teens and perhaps the mid-20s by some scholars' estimation (Arnett & Taber, 1994). This is a distinct developmental period characterized by its focus on identity formation as Arnett (2004) notes,

> This period is not simply an "extended adolescence," because it is much different from adolescence, much freer from parental control, much more a period of independent exploration. Nor is it really "young adulthood," since this term implies that an early stage of adulthood has been reached, whereas most young people in their twenties have not made the transitions historically associated with adult status—especially marriage and parenthood—and many of them feel they have not yet reached adulthood. It is a new and historically unprecedented period of the life course, so it requires a new term and a new way of thinking; I call it *emerging adulthood*. (Arnett, 2004, p. 4)

Emerging adulthood is distinguished, according to Arnett, by its instability. This instability provides a fertile breeding ground for questions of identity and career aspiration. The questions of "Who am I?" and "What do I want to do?" are intertwined in emerging adulthood (Archer, 1982; Arnett, 2004). A search for the self amid society is a question that sociologists and social psychologists explored long before "emerging adulthood" was embraced as a developmental period. Socialization and socialization theory considers the process by which individuals learn how to become a part of and belong to social groups. One of the most paradoxical results of understanding how to assimilate into a particular culture, through its rules, customs and ideologies, is the development of the self (Elkind & Handel, 1989; Swart & Grauerholz, 2012). Arnett argues that, for emerging adults, love and work are two defining contexts that shape their understanding of themselves and their function within society. Each of those contexts is

influenced by socialization agents (Swart & Grauerholz, 2012). The work of Cynthia A. Hoffner, Kenneth J. Levine, and Raiza A. Toohey (2008) examines how television is a powerful socialization agent for emerging adults. Their work points to other research in the field by Fredric M. Jablin, who has identified five socialization sources: family, educational institutions, the media, peers, and volunteer or part-time jobs—which contribute to the process by which adolescents come to understand what it means to work or establish a "anticipatory socialization to work" (Jablin, 2000).

The media, as a source for socialization, exerts a powerful influence on individuals from an early age. Hoffner et. al. (2008) point to research by Bandura (2001) to explain how young people learn by observation and imitation of those they admire, sometimes that includes family members and other times that could mean characters and figures they see on television. Beyond imitation, Hoffner et. al. (2008) argue that behavior includes, "the adoption of attitudes, values, aspirations, and other characteristics observed in others" (p. 283). Television provides information about the world of work that young people can use to determine the shape of their career aspirations. Hoffner's own research has delved into how television can introduce emerging adults to careers they had not previously considered and what those job activities entail, which go beyond the limited scope of much mainstream television (Levine & Hoffner, 2006). Socialization of work through television viewing is of particular use for my research to understand how norms of professional work are codified and circulated within the culture.

As educators, we might be inclined to deny the influence of television in students' lives. But Toby Miller, in his editor's note to *Television Studies*, argues, "Educators are often greatly afeared of television. A slew of studies seeking to account for the alienation between college students and their professors places the blame for student disinterest in pedagogy on the popular, and especially TV, which is held responsible for 'prolonged

immaturity" (p. 8, citing Bauerlein, 2006; Lasch, 1979, pp. 226-8). So there is a desire in conducting this research and looking back to the work of Miller and Hoffner et. al., that a bridge can be made between the knowledge of work in contemporary art that students walk in with and the notions of what that perception entails for art education pedagogy.

Another facet of this discussion considers emerging adults from the perspective of audience research. This research harks back to Fiske (1978) and television studies in the exploration of audience's agency when it comes to the stories they are exposed to and digest through television. Fiske calls upon the work of Roland Barthes, a linguist and philosopher, and the strength of myth,

> A myth is a story by which a culture explains or understands some aspect of reality or nature. Primitive myths are about life and death, men and gods, good and evil. Our sophisticated myths are about masculinity and femininity, about the family, about success, about the British policeman, about science. A myth, for Barthes, is a culture's way of thinking about something, a way of conceptualizing or understanding it. (Fiske, 1978, p. 88)

For our purposes, then, the myth at the center of my study is the myth of work within contemporary art or perhaps the archetype of the artist, and the objective of the research is to unveil the language and rules that subtextually govern subjects' understanding through their experience of watching this televised program. As John Hartley writes in *Understanding News*, "[myth allows a society] to use factual or fictional characters and events to make sense of its environment, both physical and social." (from John Tulloch's *Television Drama: Agency, Audience, and Myth*, pp. 6-7. Citing: Hartley, 1982). Conflicts that run up against the prevailing myth can be negotiated, perhaps policed, within the context of popular culture and fictional characters. Fiske makes note

that there is not a distinction between fictional myth and reality, but between competing myths: one dominant myth reiterated by popular culture and counter-myths found in smaller subcultures. I would posit that, in the case of contemporary artists or the artist as a figure, reality television provides the space in which to challenge dominant myths.

This process runs parallel to identity work and the experimentation of "trying on" and testing what does and does not work for an individual based on their understanding of social context and current interests. Popular culture theorist, Hermann Bausinger (1984) reflected on this process of "trying on" identities and creating meaning through television viewing: "Television may simply reinforce viewers' prior beliefs by showing characters who embody those beliefs being rewarded in comparison to those who embody the opposite. Thus television may legitimate or validate the viewers' private experiences. Or television may increase the salience of ideas or ways of thinking with which the viewer is already familiar" (Halloran, 1970, pp. 53). Television, as a cultural practice and myth maker, serves as a site and a tool for emerging adults to negotiate and police the boundaries of what an artist is and what they do in addition to the range of professional careers in the arts.

Additionally, the pursuit of authenticity as a practice within reality TV viewing, as discussed earlier within the literature review, becomes uniquely critical to the understanding of how emerging adults understand and derive value from their television viewing. Authenticity as an end goal of reality TV viewing, arrived at from repeated exposure to the conventions of the genre and interrogation of its subject, equates to settling on an accepted version of "reality." This reality is at once a reflection of viewers' understanding of themselves and their cultural context. Ouellette and Hay's (2008) research on reality TV revealed, "Authenticity is something that we must work to produce, as we seek to construct an identity as normal and unique. This framework for

understanding neoliberalism and selfhood has been used to understand the preoccupation with authenticity in Reality Television (RTV)" (p. 461). Construction of identity and an understanding of selfhood characterize emerging adulthood as a developmental stage, and reality TV viewing as a process of policing and validation.

Continuing the evaluation of television and visual culture's role in shaping young attitudes and perceptions, Kerry Freedman, in her initial research undertaken with John Wood, examined ways in which students respond to forms of visual culture and how they utilize these forms in understanding their social world. Themes that resulted from the study concerned the purposes of imagery, the interpretation of images, and the relationships that students saw between images. Within the themes, they found that students tended to place the purpose of the imagery with the creator, interpret the imagery in a literal way versus examining its sociocultural context, and yet they were better capable of analyzing extended meaning when associations were made between images. The student responses illuminate how, even though popular culture and fine art both use signs to summon previous associations in the minds of their audience for persuasive meaning, it was nevertheless more difficult for students to unpack fine art's more complex meaning, all of which contradicts previous thought that, when viewed, multi-layered rich objects of meaning would produce richer associations. Likewise, students were more comfortable analyzing and interpreting images from popular culture since they had more experience with those forms. These findings suggest that popular culture, if framed correctly, could be an accessible springboard for the discussion of contemporary art.

Since the publication of her study in 1999, the content of popular culture in the form of interactive media—television, cinema, web-based entertainment—has exploded and Freedman has become one of the foremost voices for utilizing television in visual arts

learning. As she wrote in “Please Stand By for an Important Message: Television in Art Education” (2003),

> Students also learn about the visual arts through TV. They learn that art has the power to convince, persuade, seduce, make what is fiction seem to be fact, and to make reality appear unreal. … When television was new, people became concerned that students would have difficulty understanding its fictional quality; now, however, its fictional quality has become reality—that is, it is part of the lived experience of students’ daily life. (p. 143)

A call to embrace this change has become the maxim of Freedman’s writings, which explore the most appropriate forms for presenting visual culture learning in the K-12 classroom. Within the previous article published in 2003, Freedman addresses issues of construction, authorship, and economic influences that come with the territory of visual culture. Freedman's (2003) research into the uses of television for adolescents is also brought up with a discussion in the article about the reasons adolescents use media, ranging "from entertainment to self-identification to escape" (p. 165).

Lastly, Freedman’s article, “Adolescents, Identity, and Visual Community,” published in 2004, explores different ways adolescents use visual culture mediums to distinguish specific group identities. Freedman discusses various types of communities that are prescribed by visual culture, and how these are not always a negative byproduct of exposure to the conventions of popular culture. This analysis deviates from the typical conversation about visual culture's negative effects in communities (i.e., reinforcing sexist or racist group identities) and questions the ways visual culture props up inclusive communities. Her analysis, culled from research, reinforces the powerful influence of visual culture (and by extension the need for visual culture in education) as adolescents increasingly perceive themselves as social beings with the advent of new media

technologies and are concerned with their social identities of which most are shaped by forms of visual culture.

CONCLUSION

This literature review is meant to ground later analysis by bridging some of the intersecting theories—from critical theory to media theory—and outlining critical resources into television as a site of study, and reality television as a unique iteration of that site. The survey of literature into television studies, and reality television as a genre, informs a larger discussion of television as a cultural practice and mediator of cultural myths, wherein emerging adults access its language and texts to negotiate and police the boundaries of what contemporary art is and is not, art's value, and the characteristics with which they identify among creative professionals. Additionally, audience research theory and methodology as well as psycho-developmental theory of emerging adulthood were touched upon to inform decisions made about research design and analysis. Chapter 3 delves into research methodology for the study, both in the evolution the research took to its current design, and the theoretical frameworks that determined its analysis.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The primary purpose of this study was to examine how or if perceptions of contemporary art and artists change once emerging adult participants are given a popular culture approach as a tool and a site for discourse. For this reason, I utilized an exploratory strategy of discourse analysis to determine the discourse around reception of the reality television show, *Work of Art: The Next Great Artist*. Data collection tools included a pre-screen emailed survey, individual interviews with each participant, email episode response questionnaires, and two focus group sessions to discuss television show content. Data analysis was triangulated between the developments and emergent categories that came from the email episode responses and the cumulative focus group sessions. This chapter describes the research design, rationale, evolution from phase one to phase two, and the pairing of discourse analysis with focus group research to answer my central research question.

GROUNDED THEORY AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Qualitative analysis of surveys, individual and focus group interviews were completed using a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). An initial hypothesis was not sought, and instead I endeavored to create rich data in which predictive or explanatory patterns would emerge (Patton, 1980) and form a theoretical model based on the data. In Patton's words, "the theory emerges from the data; it is not imposed on the data" (p. 278). Analysis was more of an iterative process, derived from the data itself after being examined for patterns, similarities, and discursive occurrences. The analytic process involved repeated grouping, sorting, and reevaluation of working hypotheses. I was open to whatever the data would uncover, even if it was far afield of

my research question itself. Integral to the process of utilizing grounded theory was the use of memos and memoing for data coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Groenewald, 2008). Memoing implied a systemic way of grouping and categorizing central conceptual and conversational categories into my own reflective notes with attention to how these categories were discursively expressed. For this study, I underlined in colored pencil first, then underlined in the same colored pen once I had read and taken notes through the last focus group for anything that developed (notes and conceptual developments along these lines were also done in the same color), and lastly I doubled underlined the strongest sections to excerpt. The first read through and underlining (coding) of the data was for immersion (Groenewald, 2008). The second was about my own notes and reflection process as I built and evaluated emerging theories and relationships between conceptual categories. This process is very similar to the open coding process advocated by Corbin and Strauss (1990), with the addition of examining words, lexicalized phrases, and sentences through the lens of how they function within the discourse and either challenge or reflect implicit ideologies. Over the course of coding in this way, I was able to organize and formulate developing hypotheses that originated from the data itself rather than being imposed on the data by my own bias (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1980).

Grounded theory, in this case, is also supplemented by a social constructionist perspective, Albert Bandura's social cognitive theories, and Stuart Hall's theories of television effects. These are aligned with the grounded theory approach because they both take their cue from the agency of research subjects. Bandura's social cognitive theory became especially relevant to this research because of the attention to media influence that was transactional and multi-directional. Bandura (2001) makes the pivotal connection, for my work; between identity work, media influence, and social interaction: "Human self-development, adaptation, and change are embedded in social systems.

Therefore, personal agency operates within a broad network of socio-structural influences. In these agentic transactions, people are producers as well as products of social systems" (p. 266). Bandura's theory places great import on the self-reflection of participants to environmental factors and social interaction. It is this theory that elucidates the influence of media on participants, but also the interactional influence of participants on each other. Stuart Hall's work is also invested in the interactional exchange between participants and their environment. Within the analysis, I used Stuart Hall's reception and effects research, which outlined an encoded theoretical model that emphasizes meaning derived from interaction, between the object and its audience, and among viewers. I was and am interested in understanding where negotiation and resistance take place interactionally among participants and what themes surrounded these points. The curious and exciting part of this research is in participant acquiescence or recapitulation to dominant ideologies of work and creative labor, art as a cultural form, and their own pursuit of identities within that discussion. Analysis of this data takes into account the negotiation of meaning that happens not only when participants encounter the television show, but also as they socially construct meanings about the show together.

Discourse analysis was employed in this study. The data analyzed was the discourse of group language used during conversation about the events and characters of each television episode to better understand how emerging adult viewers regard and position themselves discursively in relation to the narrative of the show and its portrayal of contemporary art and practice. In some sense these purposes diverge. On the one hand, I analyzed focus group data and individual written responses for signifiers of familiarity with the subject matter over time and a level of comfort that makes the field of contemporary art accessible. On the other, part of the efficacy of using discourse analysis provided me opportunity to understand some of the existing beliefs surrounding

contemporary artists as figures and contemporary art as a professional field among emerging adults. Both purposes are of importance to the field of art education as informative context and pedagogical tool.

By choosing this participant population and demographic makeup, I am not privileging this account as more "real" than another, whether that be among those more conversant in contemporary art topics, from another country, within a different community or subculture whose reality is ultimately constructed and negotiated differently than those of the participants. The objective of the study is to create a local, micro-narrative pilot study that has the potential to contextualize one set of experiences with this media format and text. The generalizability of this study to other locations or settings was not a central objective. This data cannot truly be generalized, since the sample size and research methodology was more appropriate for conducting a small pilot study. However, there is potential for an expanded study in the future, utilizing a larger sample size. This study was more attuned to the meaning-making perspectives of the participants as a rich data set (Erickson, 1986) with which to draw from in future study.

DATA COLLECTION

The tools used for data collection included a pre-screen emailed survey (Appendix B), individual interviews with each participant (Appendix C), email episode response questionnaires (Appendix D), and two focus group sessions to discuss television show content (Appendix E for both). All data was collected with the intent to protect against the intrusion of researcher perspective and bias. To that end, my role in participant observation was kept to a minimum (Creswell, 1998) and I only inserted myself into the conversation during focus groups when participants ran into an extended

pause where they had run out of things to say and I would supply a prompt based on the previous line of conversation they had engaged in.

RECRUITMENT AND FOCUS GROUPS

Recruitment entailed a random selection of participants drawn from The University of Texas at Austin undergraduate student body. I chose undergraduate university students because of my interest in "emerging adulthood" as a psychological-developmental period (Arnett, 2000), and the process of identity work that emerging adults uniquely engage in during this period in their lives. Identity work became important to this research as the question of how perceptions of contemporary artists changed or reflected back on participant's own professional and academic ambitions; a wrestling with identity and societal roles unique to the emerging adult. I chose a heterogeneous group consisting of two males and two females, hoping to solicit a variety of perspectives and knowledge (Stewart, 1990). Other variables were controlled through randomization in early stages of screening. An online pre-screen Qualtrics questionnaire included direct responses and multi-item Likert scale responses to determine that participants met initial criteria of age (between 18-24) and major of study (e.g., any non-art major). The online pre-screen also served to provide baseline information about their academic and professional aspirations as well as their understanding and exposure to contemporary art and reality TV. In the first round of recruitment, where the study was listed and called for volunteers on a university-wide message board, there was a very low response rate. Of the initial respondents in Spring semester 2015, there were five females and one male that fit the baseline criteria to be considered for the study. Instead of discarding data from this participant group as insubstantial, I used this group (ultimately a group of two females and one male) as a trial run for the pilot study data that would take

precedence in the final study and from which I would draw conclusions. This initial group went through the same individual interviews at this stage to gather a richer, more in-depth picture of their baseline experience and familiarity with the discourses of contemporary art that the second round of participants would also go through. Both groups were also given the funds to buy season one of *Work of Art* and watch all ten episodes in order to discuss them as a group. However, the process of data collection and focus group design was amended in this first round due to conflicting schedules between participants, necessitating that the focus group discussions take place over Computer Mediated Simulation (CMS), specifically Skype. Even though this group was comprised of a deficient sample size and configuration, the superficial results found in focus group data suggested that my hypothesis had merit. The first round also gave me the opportunity to refine some focus group techniques and discover ways to remove myself and my overt influence as a researcher in the course of data collection. This enabled greater room for rich group interactions between the participants to develop, instead of a dynamic occurring between myself and participants.

In the second round, conducted in Fall semester 2015, I selected two male and two female participants at random through a computer generator out of a pool of 80 respondents to the pre-screen questionnaire. Participants were once again given the funds to buy the first season of *Work of Art* on iTunes and compensated $100.00 at the completion of study tasks that took a sum total of three weeks and approximately ten and a half hours per participant. The focus group size was kept to a minimum for manageability of a pilot study and to produce rich discussion of extensive content (Bloor, Frankland, & Thomas, 2000). Market research calls for a much larger focus group size, as Bloor et. al. describes, but social research that seeks out rich data and response from each participant, can use a smaller group size. Grounded theory research also supports the use

of a smaller group size based on the needs of theoretical saturation (Morgan et. al., 1998; Creswell, 1998). Theoretical saturation is the point in which the data between participants is extensive and rich enough for patterns to emerge. This study sought to focus on the potential *perspective change* of participants, which meant a focused attention on the development of discourse from each participant. A smaller group size offered the opportunity for focused attention.

The second group went through the same process as the first: each of the participants interviewing with me one-on-one initially for approximately 30 minutes and then together for approximately 45 minutes, midway through viewing all the television episodes and then again as a group after completing the season. Over the course of the study, I assessed baseline understanding through initial one-on-one interviews and development of understanding through discursive progress made during the second and third group interviews. Viewing of each episode was conducted on the participant's own time, but participants were also asked to complete and email in a post-show questionnaire for each episode before each focus group session. These responses gave me insight into their developing personal beliefs and vocabulary before they negotiated meaning further during the focus group session. Volunteers were not, however, asked to describe or give information about their socio-economic or cultural background. Some of this information could be intuited by responses given to indirect questions about family or previous experiences with art, but this information was not ultimately taken into account in the final analysis. If there were to be a larger study, it might be useful to include this information as it could reveal deeper insights and affect study outcomes. To outline, data collection included:

- Pre-screen questionnaire

- Individual, 30 minute interviews
- Post-viewing response survey after each episode
- 45 minute focus group, halfway through season after watching episodes 1-5
- 45 minute focus group, at conclusion of season after watching episodes 6-10

In-depth focus group data was the main source of discourse analysis in order to construct a setting most conducive to enabling each participant's experiences, thoughts, and feelings to emerge and contribute to the discourse of television viewing (Krueger, 1988). Focus groups create an informal discourse community that mimics natural settings in which viewers discuss television content. Comparative analysis of the focus group session transcript provided me with an understanding of how participants negotiate *Work of Art*, and as a discursive text for understanding contemporary art and how they situate themselves and their own experiences within those narratives. Post-show individual questionnaires were also used to reinforce or challenge patterns seen in group interviews within these analyses. Data was triangulated between the developments and emergent categories that came from emailed, individual post-show questionnaires and both of the focus group sessions' transcripts (Creswell, 1998). By triangulating results from these divergent data collection sources, I was able to check and verify my conceptual categorizations of the discourse and the emerging discourses on contemporary art and artists. Member checks were not employed in this study due to time constraints, but would offer a way to validate results in future studies.

Because reception to television media is typically within an informal setting, I employed naturalistic data collection methods of semi-structured, guided conversations and participant observation. My questions would initiate conversation at the beginning of the session and at rare moments when conversation had lulled to a complete stop.

Participants discussed the show in the context of its format: a competition. The aesthetic concerns and values were built off of conversations about the characteristics of the competition's winners and losers. The contestants became characters that participants felt comfortable analyzing critically. Much of this kind of conversational framing by the participants is supported by research in reality television viewing (Ellis, 2003; Hill, 2005). Reasons for why this occurred had to do partially with the research design, thus it is influenced, at least partially, by researcher intent. However, the competition framework served simply as a launchpad for more abstract interactions that I analyzed in detail. Participants communicated the social significance of this program—and the perceived authenticity of the real people that comprised its cast—and reflected their own perceptions of the artists. One of the findings of this research indicated that participants are capable of negotiating nuanced understandings of what art is and is not, given a graduated popular culture approach like that encountered in this study.

DESCRIPTION OF TELEVISION SHOW

Even though it is not central to my analysis, a perfunctory understanding of the TV show itself and its design is useful as I discuss participant reactions. The show is designed as a competition between 13 artists—proficient in many disciplines and mediums—who compete for a grand prize at the end of the show that includes a monetary award and a solo exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. Each episode is focused around a challenge, or what many students who have had classes in studio art will recognize as a creative prompt that all the artists must follow in creating their work. Some of the prompts included "portrait," "shock art," "public art," and "make a work out of garbage and discarded items from a warehouse." Sometimes the prompt suggested

potential content of the work, but other times it would simply suggest process or material. The artists all receive advice and mentorship as they complete their pieces from art auctioneer and collector Simon de Pury. Conversations between Simon and the artists are filmed in addition to "conversations" (due to the direct address) that artists have with the camera (and by extension the television audience) about the events of that day or their own thought process as they create work. After completing their creations in the time allowed, anywhere from a day to a few days, the artwork is mounted in a gallery as a show. This is true for all but the public art challenge, where the final product was displayed in a public art park. Three judges and the show host—representing different aspects of the art world—evaluate the works, call back a selection of artists for oral critique, review among themselves (for the camera), and then make a final decision about who won the challenge and who was eliminated from the competition. The judges included actress/model and art aficionado China Chow, critic Jerry Saltz, gallerist Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn, and art dealer and gallery owner Bill Powers.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I explained the theoretical frameworks for research design (e.g., grounded theory supplemented by social constructivism, social cognitive theory, and television effects theory) and analysis (i.e., discourse analysis). Data collection was discussed and tools used in this study were examined. The identification and selection process for participants, data collection, and analysis procedures were also examined in this chapter to better establish the rationale behind the research design and frame consequent analysis discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Data and Analysis

This chapter provides both full descriptions of participants and how I have classified them in terms of how conversant they were in art historical and critical terminology and liking towards contemporary artworks. Likewise, there is an introduction to the group's dynamic in focus groups and my method of transcription that accord with use of discourse analysis. Among the analysis and results, themes have been identified in the following categories: (a) Distancing and Nuanced Progression of Judgment, (b) Artist as Myth: Contestant vs Artist, and (c) Value and Meanings of Art.

DATA: PARTICIPANTS

As stated in the previous chapter, four participants were solicited for this study. Initial interviews gave me baseline information from which to chart their progress in confidence and conversance over time in the course of the research. All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the participants involved.

Figure 2: Chart of Participant Information

Name	Major	Age	Gender	Previous Coursework	Previous Visit to Gallery/Museum/Exhibit
Tod	Plan II	21	Male	No	Yes
Mel	Computer Science	18	Male	No	Yes
Zoe	Business	19	Female	Yes	Yes
Meg	Undecided; Transfer to Chemical Engineering	18	Female	No	Yes

Tod

At the time of the study in October 2015, Tod is a 21-year old senior in the Plan II program (a four-year interdisciplinary arts and science honors program) at The University of Texas at Austin. He did not take any art courses in secondary school in his native Yorkshire, England, although he feels comfortable discussing art with his friends and family. Tod professed a clear preference for conventional art of the canon. Referring to the latest exhibition he had visited at the Blanton Museum of Art (university art museum), he described a sculpture that featured "tall, almost-porcelain figures" (personal communication, October, 27, 2015) that were made by a Latin American artist as "repulsive" because of its "exaggerated features" that were "deeply unsettling," as

opposed to "traditional landscapes" that he found "beautiful" and "glorify[ed] the world we live in" (personal communication, October, 27, 2015). His association of contemporary art in the museum with negative descriptors, and traditional, canonic landscapes with those that are more positive led me to classify Tod as resistant to contemporary art. In his one-on-one interview with me, we discussed the possible purposes of art, which he felt was meant "to express part of the human experience that can't be expressed in any other way" (personal communication, October, 27, 2015). Going into the study, Tod was classified as highly conversant in art terminology, but resistant to contemporary art.

Mel

Mel is an 18-year old freshman in Computer Science. His formative schooling took place in New Delhi, India where he grew up. Mel entered the study with a sense of which artists could be considered contemporary, and a basic understanding of how to describe the sculptural pieces he preferred to see. In his initial individual interview, Mel discussed the last museum exhibit he had visited of contemporary artist Anish Kapoor's work in New Delhi and how that contrasted with the "abstract paintings" (personal communication, October, 27, 2015) he encountered at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He noted that the "structures" (personal communication, October, 27, 2015) in the Kapoor exhibit were more accessible, since their three-dimensionality allowed for greater play between light and shadow that paintings could not accomplish. This was the one area in which Mel could clearly articulate his opinion using technical terms for art-making. Going into the study, Mel was classified as poorly conversant in art terminology, but open to contemporary art.

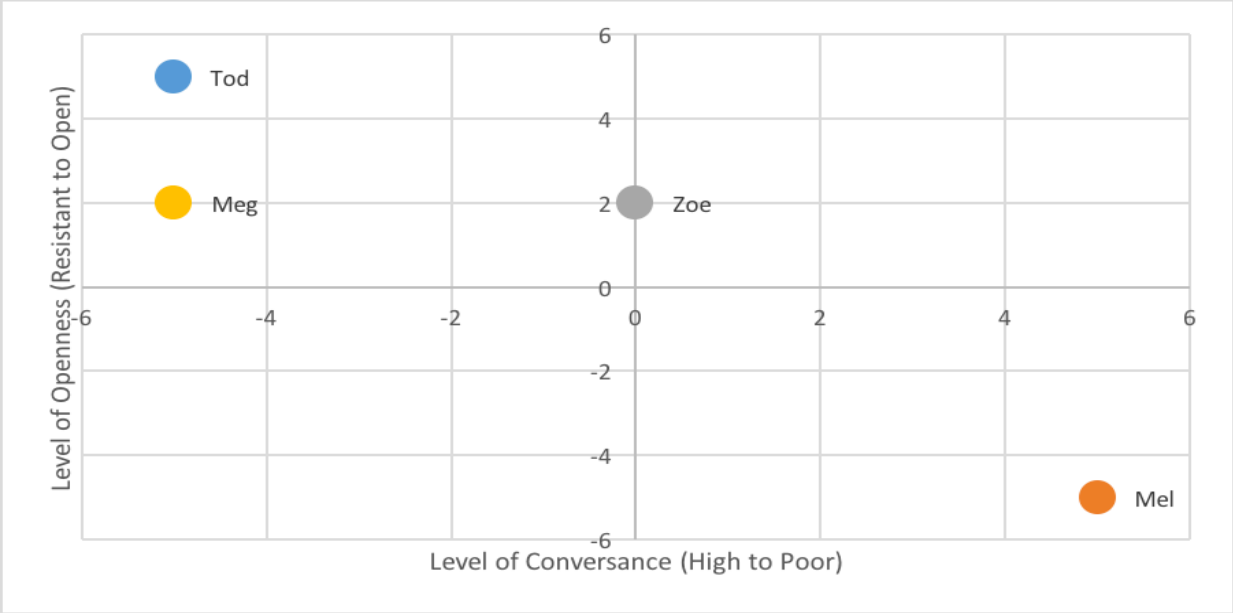
Zoe

Zoe is a 19-year old sophomore in the McCombs School of Business, completing coursework in the honors business program and in finance. Among the participants, Zoe is the only one who completed Pre-AP classes in art during high school. Both she and her older sister chose to pursue business school because their father works in finance and the alternatives, "engineering and medicine" (personal communication, October, 29, 2015) were either "too difficult or too messy" (personal communication, October, 29, 2015). She remembered a trip to the Musee D'Orsay and The Louvre from the previous summer, when she and a friend discussed how they were disappointed the Mona Lisa was so much smaller and less amazing than they expected when viewed in person. However, she claimed to love a majority of artworks, including contemporary works, remarking that art's purpose was "to make you think, to challenge your thought process…challenge your perspective and, on top of that, to convey a meaning, a message or an emotion" (personal communication, October, 29, 2015). Based on her initial interview, Zoe was classified as moderately conversant in art terminology, and moderately resistant to contemporary art.

Meg

Meg is an 18-year old transfer student who hopes to declare as a Chemical Engineering major. She did not have any experience taking art classes in secondary school or practicing art on her own, but she professed to a personal connection with contemporary art through her sister who both "loves and hopes to create" (personal communication, October, 30, 2015) more contemporary works herself. Meg did not share her sister's love of contemporary works, saying that they were often too abstract and too based in process, for her liking. Meg was classified as moderately conversant in art terminology, but resistant to contemporary art.

Figure 3: Chart of Participant Levels of Conversance to Openness



As noted, participants all initially had varying degrees of comfort with discussing topics of contemporary art. Among the participants, Tod was the most conversant and then Zoe, perhaps because of coursework in Pre-AP Art. The last two participants in the second focus group, Meg and Mel, had similar levels of comfort that were less informed than the first two. Additionally, the varying degrees to which participants preferred watching or enjoyed different types of television shows were noted in the initial data gathering phase, to inform the context of participant commentary on the show itself and its conventions. Zoe and Meg were most comfortable with watching and acknowledging their appreciation for reality shows from the interviews conducted with each participant individually. In the group sessions, they would be most readily able to identify reality television conventions and typical formats in a comparative way for the rest of the group.

GROUP DYNAMICS

Power dynamics within the group favored Tod from the very start. He became the dominant speaker after initiating the group talk within the first focus group session and took command of the floor. Speculation on why that is might have to do with his age (he was the eldest among the participants), a possibility that might follow since Zoe, the second oldest among them, directly followed Tod in interactional dominance. Intertwined with age might be Tod and Zoe's additional years of experience and earned confidence in a collegial environment, where their opinions have been previously solicited in an educational context. Regardless, questions posed to the group primarily came from Tod, and his positioning within the group structure lent his arguments and positions weight. Indications of the other participants' abdication of control to Tod as a speaker could be seen in repeated postural orientations towards him when he was speaking, when they were voicing a dissenting or new opinion, and when they reserved an opinion (which I was only privy to from their email episode responses), even though opportunities to express those dissenting opinions presented themselves over the course of conversation. Because of Tod's role as the primary speaker, his stance on the artists, the art, and the show itself held more weight throughout the group sessions, even as it weakened over time. Tod's first turn at speaking, when I asked the group to just begin by giving their general reactions about what they had seen of the television show thus far, was, "I'm a little surprised, I guess. I didn't expect to enjoy [the show] as much as I have been. I don't watch a huge amount of reality TV. Uh, but uh, I, I actually find it pretty compelling" (personal communication, November, 6, 2015). Tod's stance accomplishes a few things from the outset. First, he communicates with quite a few discursive markers (Schiffren, 1988), including the use of *I guess, uh*, *but*, and *actually*. These all function as discursive hedges that achieve the goal of distancing Tod from his own position.

Secondly, Tod establishes himself as someone who does not "watch huge amounts of reality TV;" the value implication being that, outside of the requirements of this research study, reality TV does not hold value for him. This may well align itself with a pervasive taste distinction that sees reality television as a sub-genre of television being as low brow or derivative of low culture (Bourdieu, 1999; Geraghty, 1990). Following Bourdieu's theories on distinctions of taste in a classed society (1999), this distancing from low brow culture may be meant to define Tod by default as having more elite tastes and an affinity towards high culture forms, and by extension, making him more of an authority on the subject of art as a subject of high culture. The grappling for an authorial position during discussion would continually return to the question of which participant exhibited the most insight into what work and which artists were in alignment with high culture. But also, concurrently, there was a sense that those who could "see through" the low brow form of reality TV to its producer-intent, were also in a more powerful conversational position. Insight, in this case, is a possible signifier for having the cultural and socio-economic background that provides a person with a set of art discourses that allow them to access art's interpretability. At the crux of what the research hopes to accomplish is whether watching the show enables all participants access to this capability or at least the performance of it.

TRANSCRIPTION PROCESS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Effort was made in the transcription to most accurately convey the speech acts, phonemes (being distinct sounds that distinguish one word from another), and word variations in participant speech as a way of getting at where their discourse shows change, negotiation, consideration, or reversal. Excerpted examples of data should be

read almost like a musical score; speech found at the tail ends or in between "spaces" of stacked rows should be spoken simultaneously. Overlap, while not overreaching in this case, existed within the dialogue, especially when there were short, verbal affirmations of subject positions.

Example:

Tod: I really liked the way he talked about that, yea

Mel: [Eric? He argued] [yea]

Speakers consistently made space for each other's speech, shown here as the gap between "he" and "talked" when Tod spoke. Interjections, however, do not fit neatly within those spaces, and often caused overlap. Bracketed speech (in the example exhibited by Mel) denotes the secondary speaker who does the work of interjection or contesting the floor for a brief amount of time before abdicating back to the primary speaker. En dashes (--) denote an interjection that is a transition relevance point that switches primary speaker position to the participant who interjected.

Intentional pause (of more than 2-3 seconds) that was not the result of allowing space for other's speech is communicated in an exaggerated ellipsis of more than three dots, whereas a shortened, intentional pause taken up quickly is marked by only two dots in the ellipsis.

Bold words and phrases in the transcription are my own emphasis to draw attention to lexicalized phrases and speech acts that serve a functional purpose in the interaction and will be discussed further in the analysis. Speaker emphasis is noted in transcription with italics and elongation of vowel sounds (e.g., "yea-ah").

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

"One of the most important ways in which people relate to each other socially is through the mediation of things" (Celia Lury, 1996, p. 150).

Analysis was conducted by a few means. First, transcript and survey response text was scanned for "art historical terminology" for frequency and density. Initially, art historical terminology was drawn from *Art: A Brief History*, the fifth edition, by Marilyn Stokstad and Michael Cothren, but that proved to be insufficient for the purposes of indexing current art world terms. Instead, I combined the Tate museum glossary of terms with terminology that I identified—specifically verbs—often used in art world circles and cross-referenced with reviews and articles in *Art Forum*, a magazine that covers international contemporary art and exhibitions. This proved to be a more comprehensive glossary to draw upon. The descriptive terminology that participants used in their written responses did not significantly vary over time. If anything, there was a marginal, 10 percent decrease in the density of descriptive adjectives, adverbs, phrases used to describe the artworks over the course of episode survey responses. Instead, what became more interesting and indicative was the shift in the object of the descriptors and their exactness to their subject. For instance, there was a heavy reliance on descriptive adjectives such as *good*, (*un*)*interesting*, *creative*, *having/lacking depth*, and *original* in the first half of the season. By the season's second half, after the first focus group session, there were more instances of discussing works in richer ways and with greater subjectivity, for which participants felt capable of taking ownership. Phrasing would shift from, "Miles' piece was really good and really striking" to "Miles translated his vision very well" and "the red team's work just didn't keep my attention. Their work didn't have a connection to the environment." There was more critical engagement in these

later responses that does more than just repeat the voice and words of show judges. The influence of judges' opinions was still there, but over the course of the season participants seemed to become more adept at translating that vocabulary to their own positions.

The second method of analysis used was based in grounded theory and involved seeking out patterns of interaction within session transcripts and building a theory on the function of emergent patterns within the interaction. For this four-person pilot study, I completed a single interview among four participants (Labov, 1984). This garnered fruitful territory for discourse analysis as participants were challenged by one another to speak and much less prompted by my own questioning. Their interaction motivated participants to speak, share opinions, contest the floor, argue, and co-construct explanations. Participants utilized, constructed, and renegotiated meaning based on what I identify as two conflicting discourses. The first, a discourse of cultural status—one that deconstructs the show as a form of entertainment that is governed by market forces—and the second, a discourse of critical engagement that engages the art created on the show and the artists as producers of art and not contestants in a competition.

Distancing and Nuanced Progression of Judgment

I had hypothesized, going into the research, that learning and the process of familiarization for participants would follow a linear path over the course of watching the show. I believed participants would hear artist-contestants and judges discuss the work made on the show and find new ways of talking and thinking about art themselves. What I did not expect was that participants would use the voice of the judges to bolster or form their own opinions at first, but then, gaining confidence in the material would otherize

and discredit judges' opinions as a way of defining their own. The power of modeling was seen in some most clearly in their early written responses to each episode. Mel wrote in the first episode response, "I loved that both their portraits seemed to have another 'dimension' to them – the 'stretch' in Abdi's portrait, and the 'trapped' in Erik's" (personal communication, November 3, 2015). This opinion draws from a sampling of commentary from judge's about the depth of each work's meaning connected to "dimensionality." But also, Mel is modeling a response that show contestant Erik himself gave when asked why he chose to paint his portrait on an easel, "I almost wanted to have him *trapped* in there" (emphasis mine). Language used was also very close in paraphrasing of the mainstay judge, Bill Power's commentary on Abdi's piece, "I also kind've liked that it had a vertical thrust to it. You felt that he's really *stretch*, *stretching* out, and that came through" (emphasis mine) (Powers, 2010). These are not words that Mel used during our initial one-on-one interview when discussing Anish Kapoor's work. Then, Mel struggled to find the words to describe the work he saw, describing Kapoor's work as "using lots of light and glass," "accessible" and "[an] interplay of light and shadow." The latter description involving "interplay" was the closest to anthropomorphizing that Mel came in his commentary, whereas "trapped" and "stretched" are descriptions that treat the work of art in a much more pliable, almost humanized sense that is more endemic to art criticism.

Meg also wrote in an episode three response about who deserved to win and who deserved to be eliminated: "[John's] art pulled me in and left me asking questions. I would have chosen to eliminate Judith. Her artwork seemed amateur and chaotic" (personal communication November 4, 2015). Both of these responses have directly adapted the language of the judges' criticism for their own position. Mel uses quotation marks around the words specifically taken from judges as a way of lending their

descriptions to his opinion, borrowing the credibility of authority figures within the show. Meg uses language that is out of place with some of her other responses and adapts phraseology of "left me asking questions" and "amateur" from the judges' own articulations of contestant work. Going one step further than Mel, Meg adopted this language for her own.

In the second half of the study, after participants had completed the season and the requisite post-show questionnaires, they met for a second time to discuss their opinions. Analysis of the second session showed a progression suggested in earlier responses where participants continued to distance themselves from judge's opinions and add nuance to their own descriptions. In discussing a public art challenge where Team 1 had won and Team 2 had lost, Zoe and Meg both reference the judges' decision in the episode, but also integrate some of what they have decided is and is not public art and their own judgment: "I think one of the reasons [Team 2] lost was that, it was a public work of art and they didn't really take in their environment," Zoe said in explanation of why she thought Team 2 lost. The judges' and the show's guest judge briefly touched upon what makes "good public artwork" in the challenge prompt, but Zoe has integrated it into her own opinion, remarking, "Like with the sky, [Team 2] was pointing towards the open sky where 9/11 had happened…Whereas, [Team 1] was like the open sky and taking everything in." Zoe has taken what was said on the show (by judges) and then narrowly defined environment as "nature" to be anything involving the urban landscape or urban environment. Meg picked up on this problematic understanding of environment and her phrasing adds more nuance to what environment could mean for public art, saying, "I don't think [Team 2's piece] belonged there either. Like, just looking at it, in that environment, it didn't look like it belonged." Meg's use of "environment" in this context is suggestive of any context in which the work finds itself, not narrowly defined

as a natural environment. She followed up with, "Whereas [Team 1's] piece, I feel like it did [belong], but I don't feel like it was as good of a piece as the other one. I feel like, the one constructed by Miles and his group [Team 2]; I feel like it was a better piece, just not there." This opinion diverged from that of the judges' final decision and marks a point in which Meg developed a tentative sense of confidence in her own judgment of the work.

Artist as Myth: Contestant vs. Artist

Identity work is also interconnected with this discursive work as the participants are inter-subjectively creating and negotiating their understanding of who they are in relation to the real artists and reality TV characters of this particular genre. Identity, as a discursive notion and territory, is publicly experienced through discourse. This understanding of identity also accords with the postmodernist notion of identity as contingent and plural (Laclau, 1990). Discursive psychological theory was the most apt lens with which to analyze this work and enabled me to see these speech acts through the perspective of identity construction. Since identity is a "flexible resource in conversational interaction" (Antaki et. al., 1996, pp. 473-4), participants often communicated their own values about art and entertainment while reflecting on the *character constructions* of artist-contestants. The term character constructions is used here to distinguish between who the participants are and how they are portrayed, often through editing and production of the show itself, as characters. Additionally, through this communication in groups, they vied for interpretive authority that recalls the work of Allen and Mendick (2012), where participants' pursuit of authenticity within artist-contestant actions involves a degree of self-examination and interactional negotiation of how perception of authenticity plays into their own position as readers of high culture.

The discourses of artist and contestant came into conflict around figures such as Miles, Erik and Jaclyn. Some of the richest data from this work came from conversations that discussed the artist-contestants as figures, where the roles of Artist and Contestant were in conflict with one another. In one set of interpretive répertoires lay the notion of a Contestant, which was attached to the conventions of the reality show as a competition, as an entertainment product, and as a false construct that produced *characters* instead of representations of real *people*. Success as a Contestant would often be described as "producing consistently good work" or displaying an upbeat personality that was uncritical of others. These versions of success are bound up in discourses of meritocracy in competition and neoliberal versions of success, where production and labor by individuals are glorified in the absence of any critical thought towards larger institutional and structural influence (Harvey, 2005). Although I do not directly analyze the content of the show itself in this study, I find it worth mentioning that the most problematic aspect of the show for me, as a researcher, is its reproduction of the meritocracy myth (McNamee & Miller, 2004) that shifts the responsibility for success and failure onto the individual actors rather than questioning why the judges, acting as placeholders for traditional gatekeepers of art, eliminate all the participants who did not fit the mold of a being white, young, and ideally thin first. This went unquestioned in the focus groups as well. Instead, the interpretive repertoire of the Artist was generated and renegotiated in different ways within this localized space. Often, it came in moments when the artist-contestants performed in ways that were unexpected of the contestant type. The following is an example of this type of negotiation. (Bold and italic formatting mine for emphasis).

Figure 4: Transcription Excerpt 1: Negotiation of "Artist"

Meg:	a.	It seems like the ones that take the most risks
	b.	seem to get the best outcome.
Tod:	c.	[yea]
Meg:	d.	**Such as**, Miles
	e.	sleeping *on* his own piece of art
	f.	**and** reading the book
	g.	for four hours.
Mel:	h.	[yea]
Meg:	i.	**So**
	j.	it seems to be working for him. [soft laughter]
Tod:	k.	**But** he
	l.	in my mind, typifies
	m.	like, the artist stereotype
Meg:	n.	[Yea]
Tod:	o.	**Because**, **you know**, **I mean**
	p.	even in the first episodes someone talked about him being the tortured
	q.	artist.
	r.	And how he's kind've a nag for the other artists to be around.
	s.	**But** when he pulls out
	t.	like, just *really* impressive products
Mel:	u.	[Yea.]
Tod:	v.	it kind've justifies it.
Zoe:	w.	[yea-ah]
	x.	So far he's been the most consistent of like all the
	y.	all his works of art are
	z.	like, I've liked

Figure 4, cont.

Meg: a1. [yea]

Tod: a2. [yea]

Zoe: a3. And whereas

a4. like with others they've had good ones and bad ones…

a5. **But** I was surprised how collaborative they were

a6. with each other.

Mel: a7. [mhmm]

a8. It didn't seem like a competition at times

Zoe: a9. [No!]

a10. It didn't.

b1. yea

b2. They like roam around and look at each other's paintings and get

b3. feedback

Meg: b4. [yea]

Zoe: b5. and I just thought they'd be kind've independent

b6. and like, a competition

Meg: b7. Yea! Like when the girl took the really pixilated picture of herself

b8. and then the guy

b9. the new one?

Tod: b10. [Erik?]

Meg: c1. Yea...? He wanted to, like, note..

Zoe: c2. [yea, the amateur]

c3. yea-ah, and

c4. he like suggested--suggested the sharpies, which was really cool.

c5, But then she took credit for it so

Throughout this excerpt, participants are discussing what they see as unusual behavior. But the underlying question here is: unusual for *whom*? For an Artist or for a Contestant? The ways in which they communicate and make sense of this tension interactionally do the work of reconstructing what it means to be a contemporary artist. Meg puts forth a position that is hedged by her repeated use of "seem." The framing of this opinion is in the form of an argument as defined by Schiffren (1988): "a discourse through which speakers support disputable positions" (p. 18). Schiffren's definition also relies on the centrality of position, dispute, and support as aspects of argument construction. The repeated use of "seem" presents Meg's argument as either weak or potentially influenced by producer-intent on the content. However, her use of discourse markers in lines d. and f. set up supportive statements for her stance that lead into line i., where "so" does the work of concluding her argument that risks "[work] for him," which is less a statement about Miles' artwork and more a statement about Miles' performance as a contestant. But there is ambiguity present that is capitalized on by Tod in his response. What becomes important to this exchange is the speaker's commitment to the idea, either through assertions or less intense displays, which feature hedging or other linguistic strategies that communicate less confidence in the position put forth. The position of an opinion, much like with narrative, is descriptive of states and events. What I observed from the data above and over the course of two focus group sessions was a sense that, as participants watched more episodes and became familiar with the content of contemporary art, they also displayed greater linguistic commitment to their opinions. Lexicalized phrases such as "I don't know" and "I think" became less indicative of uncertainty with the material and more contextualized by the politics of politeness among participant dynamics.

Tod's use of "but" as a discourse marker in lines k. and s. serve two different and distinctive purposes in his argument, and complicate the meanings of artist within the group. In line k, "but" is an adversative conjunction, one that takes Meg's argument and questions whether the risks she outlined for a successful artist-contestant are negated by Miles' classification of him as a "tortured artist." Tod reproduces this archetype and supplements the interpretive repertoire with the notion that perhaps being "tortured" makes a person a nag or difficult to be around. This is a critique of personality, inserted as a support statement with the discursive "Because" in line o. There's an implicit notion here that the personality of the artist has some bearing on the success of their work. Tod concludes this argument structure by undercutting this relationship with the use of "but" in line s., where the difficult personality of the "tortured artist" is negated if it produces "impressive *products*." The use of products here references a neoliberal tendency to see any output, creative or otherwise, as products meant to be consumed by a free market, where even performance of self is a product; this is a point of particular relevance to televised performance of self on reality TV. These notions of production and product serve to foreground any discussion of artist personalities as relevant information to their artwork among study participants. Lastly, when Tod, in line v., uses "kind've" as a hedging device before "justifies," he communicates an opening to the group that this point is still up for debate.

The group itself functioned as a negotiation of understanding and control of knowledge. Because of this, the transitions between speakers and listeners became especially relevant. Fredrick Erickson (2004) notes that, "in [an] interacting group there is a division of labor between speakers and listeners…while speakers are doing the work of speaking, listeners are doing the work of listening. Somehow the group must have ways to handle the problem of differential participation in speaking and listening during

the course of interaction" (p. 9). Zoe, in lines w. through a6., takes up Tod's position, inferring his open-ended statement as a transition relevance point where she could not only lend opposition or affirmation to his position, but also strategically segue into her own. She does this by implicitly supplementing Tod's argument with the idea of "consistency" of output being a value for work. In this act, Zoe does the work of positioning herself as another authority on the subject matter in alignment with Tod.

Another feature of talk that I attended to in Figure 4, and overall, was volume and pitch as indications of alignment with argument position. Labov (1972) points to an increased volume as a speaker strategy for maintaining control of the conversation. Implied here is that a decreased or decreasing volume signals less confidence and permits opportunities for turn-taking by a more confident speaker: "Presentation of such claims can reveal not only ideas, but moral values and claims to competence and character" (Schiffren, 1988, p. 18). Zoe is confident in her position up until she tries to separate Miles among the other artist-contestants in lines a3. and a4. The pitch and volume of her words decreases towards the end of line a4. and trails off, signaling a distancing from the position as she went on and less competence in her ability to negate or supplement the position. Instead of continuing to take a position she felt less confident in, Zoe segues into an opinion with which she is confident. The "but" in the beginning of line a5. is articulated in a pitch and volume slightly higher than line a4. and higher than the rest of line a5. As a discourse marker, Zoe's "but" is both a structural segue into a topic area she feels more comfortable discussing, but also a discursive signal that perhaps she found her preceding agreement with Tod's comments to be unsurprising, as "But" is immediately followed by "I *was* surprised." This marks a struggle for interpretive dominance within the interaction that is seen in Zoe's segue into her own insight. Her play for control of interpretation and the conversational floor is aided by both Mel and Meg who lend

affirmations ("yea" and "mhmm," lines a7. and b4.) to her statements in a co-construction of meaning around the artist as collaborative creators. Zoe posits collaboration as a value different from those in their existing interpretive repertoire for artist-contestants. Collaboration, in her argument, runs in opposition to independence (line b5.) and competition (line b6.), and is perhaps unique to artists versus competitors.

Collaboration as a potential feature of the figure of the artist as a professional versus the artist as a competitor was in flux and contested throughout the study. Once again, returning to the work of Rose and Wood (2005), the pursuit of authenticity in reality TV served as the framework by which participants could negotiate a paradox of natural, organic collaboration between artists and necessary manipulation during the production of a reality television show from its design to its editing. As Example 1 notes, the participants were *surprised* by the collaborative nature of the competition, attributing—within the course of the conversation—this collaboration to the fact that this competition featured artists versus business persons/entrepreneurs (The Apprentice) or individuals looking to find love (Bachelor/Bachelorette). The negotiation of collaboration as a characteristic of artists' professional work required participants to call upon self-knowledge (i.e., "What would I do in this situation?") in the pursuit of authenticity or "seeing past" the constructs of reality television. This collective negotiation is a matter of identity construction, not only of the notion of artist but of themselves as perceptive consumers and interpretive authorities of both art and television. By the time they were discussing collaboration in the last focus group session, they were directly pursuing authenticity and interpretive authority:

Figure 5: Transcription Excerpt 2: Collaboration and The Artist

Mel: a. Going back to it, I didn't like the episode, but I did like the idea of the challenge
b. the one where they were supposed to, to work together
Tod: c. --yep, yep, I was going to say what I thought with
d. that one, was the really interesting thing was we commented that they all work
e. together without any drama uh, in the challenges..
f. and then in the challenge where they're tasked to work together
Mel: g. [Ok]
h. is where the
i. most drama happens
Mel: j. [right, right. That's a good observation.]
Zoe: k. right.
Mel: l. Because in the studios they're going and giving each other constructive advice
m. and you should do that at that…
n. yes, yes, that's a good point. And, I mean, in that episode Erik was being self-
o. destructive. Uh, he uh, it's his fault.

….

Zoe: p. Yea, and it's funny because Ryan
q. I was looking at Ryan on the other, on the other team
r. and Ryan, like
s. the concept wasn't his, uh, but he really contributed in, like, just doing..the work
t. he just put in the hard work and his effort. And that's what Erik could have done with
u. his team. But he kind've just like, "Oh you're not going to take my idea" and just
v. stepped out of the way and decided not to do anything anymore.

Tod: w. That episode maybe made me understand why...you know, I felt like at that point for
x. a reality TV show there wasn't a lot of interpersonal drama that, you know…
Mel: y. After that they forced it?
Tod: z. Well, I'm not sure. I don't know if they forced it, because I..
a1. I realized that by having the teammates work together each each contestant had to

Figure 5, cont.

a2. contribute enough so they were seen as sort've a contributor, but also if the project
a3. was going to lose they didn't want to be seen as the one who's responsible for the
a4. overall thing or that project. So they had this weird kind of balance
Mel: a5. [should I want continue as
a6. leader and be blamed..]
Tod: a7. Exactly. You know, I want to contribute my ideas oh but I don't
a8. want that to be the central idea in case it loses. Um..so it adds this really interesting
a9. dynamic.
Mel: a10. to the point, yea
Tod: b1. Which, also, makes sense why The Apprentice has so much
b2. more..fighting and strife
b3. because..it's always there.
b4. You can see that as storing ammunition at the time goes on. Oh the judges believe
b5. this or they don't believe this.
Mel: b6. I think the red team just came together much much better than the blue team.
b7. Because, I remember, there was a part in the episode where Erik is saying
b8. "there has to be a bit of me in this piece so I can say, come judging, I can say
b9. yes, this is my contribution." And, on the other hand, on the red team, I think
b10. they were very comfortable with letting Nicole take the credit. And when the
c1. judges said that you can pick your winner, Ryan, and it was down to Ryan
c2. and Nicole, Ryan gave it to Nicole. So it was very easy, that kind of
c3. teamwork. And like with Abdi, you want them to win.

Here, talk turned directly to an exploration of the differences between the tone of collaboration as it exists in a challenge necessitating teamwork, versus the kind of ad hoc collaboration that existed during individual challenges. Participants wrestle directly with their own ability to critically uncover acts of authentic collaboration by calling upon previously stable discourses of reality TV and the artist archetype. Mel opens the floor in lines a. and b. with a persuasive tactic that makes him appear impartial, noting both a

construct that he did not like and then pointing to an element of that construct that he did appreciate. Tod uses the opportunity to clarify an insight into the two different kinds of collaboration occurring within the episode. Both Mel and Zoe support his insight with affirmative speech acts. Mel (in lines l. and m.) goes so far as to delineate collaborations outside the team challenge as "constructive" and that "you should do that at that…" before trailing off in his statement. I would argue that Mel, reflecting on what many participants continued to do with increased frequency in the second focus group, is vocalizing his own critical examination of what *he* would do (hence, "you") and finds himself stopped by the conundrum of why collaboration is constructive "at that *time"* (I am assuming based on context) versus at any other. Mel's decreased volume and abandonment of his declarative position serves as a discursive signal and a transition relevance point for Zoe who takes up the floor to segue back into familiar territory for the group. Instead of discussing the variances in collaboration directly as a concept, she goes back to concrete terms and evaluating the behaviors of artist-contestants—in this case, Erik vs Ryan—placed in similar positions within the team challenge who handled collaboration differently. This kind of meaning-making allows for a more accessible, tangible subject for participants to piece apart, all the while still getting at the larger question of collaboration as a characteristic of an artist.

Tod, however, uses Zoe's exposition to shift the conversation back to an exploration of his own theory surrounding collaboration in a reality TV context. Specifically, in lines w. to a4. Tod outlines a theory that posits a reason for why there is more interpersonal drama on other reality TV shows whose design necessitates more team-based work, versus *Work of Art* that he perceives as having less interpersonal drama and, implicitly, more collaboration. Tod's theory is as much about negotiating authenticity of collaboration by perceiving the differences between reality television

show designs, as it is about defining his position as an interpretive authority capable of perceiving these differences. Mel, submitting to Tod's position, uses it in lines b7. to c3. to negotiate the discourse of the artist. To Mel's point, the team that won was the team that acted most like artists and not competitors, allowing credit and collaboration to be of more import than assigning contributions and value to a team project. Together, the participants have critically examined the authenticity of collaborative acts, defined differences among artist-contestants and among different reality shows, to renegotiate the idea of the artist as collaborator; ultimately, they reconstituted the idea of an artist as being uniquely collaborative.

Value and Meanings of Art

The third finding of the data analysis involved the situated meaning of art and its value. None of the participants went into the group sessions with the opinion that nothing they saw constituted art. They were presented with content that was described as art and they analyzed it as such. No one abstained from discussing the artistic value of any piece because it was not art in their eyes. I would posit that conversations about what is and what was not art, conducted in more nuanced ways over the course of the research design, were reflective of critical engagement by the participants.

As Gee's introduction (1993) to discourse analysis makes clear, situated meanings aren't just the product of one individual, but negotiated and renegotiated through social interaction. This leaves open the possibility that when participants are confronted with new information and asked to discuss it, those situated meanings could be renegotiated within the course of those discussions. In the case of this study, the discourse of television viewing—specifically reality television viewing—confronts previously quasi-

stable discourses about art and its value. Over the course of the initial focus group session, participants called upon previously embedded notions of art's value being rooted in the worth of its aesthetic appeal and artistic technique, and also upon its ability to summon emotional connection from "deeper meaning" and symbolic message. But when confronted with a new possibility for what art could be (i.e., a tool to "shock" the viewer) participant talk exhibited more overlap and disagreement than in discussion of any other episode. The challenge of episode four, "A Shock to the System," (See Appendix F for a list of episodes and summaries provided by Bravotv.com) was to create a "shocking work of art" and artist-contestants were shown the controversial work of Andres Serrano as inspiration. Comparing individual written responses on episode four to the general group discussion, I uncovered ambiguities, conflicts, suppressed opinions, and the surfacing of interpretive repertoires. Unsurprisingly, opinions that were formed independently or reflective of judges' own language sometimes did not make its way into the group sessions. Meg was a participant that stayed silent for all but one moment in discussion, where she gave clarification to a question Zoe asked. However, in her written response to the episode, she had previously stated a clear stance that differed from both her fellow participants and the judges who elected to award Abdi the victory, "I enjoyed [Abdi's] work, but I do not personally believe he should have won. I was not shocked by his work. Although it had very deep and interesting symbolism, it never made me uncomfortable or shocked me like I felt it should have." One possibility for why Meg never elected to insert her opinion is a matter of topical relevance. But I would argue that it is more likely is that Meg felt less confident in stating her opinion, especially in a social environment where she is attempting to perform knowledge with which she is not yet familiar. Her use of "personally" in her statement marks it as a subjective opinion and does some small work of distancing herself from the position. I would argue that Meg felt more

comfortable evaluating the work and the artists on the basis of whether they technically fulfilled the challenge requirements or not, both in the written responses and within group sessions. This leaves a simple yes or no answer to the question of whether the piece shocked those who saw it. But Tod, being the dominant speaker capable of seizing and holding the floor, posed greater theoretical questions (in line with his self-appointed role in the group as the arbiter of high culture) that she did not feel up to the task of answering. Challenging the interpretive authority of Tod would prove to be difficult for Meg throughout the focus group sessions, even as she gained confidence in supporting and challenging both Mel and Zoe. In the last group session, Meg gained the confidence to vie for some aspect of interpretive authority:

Figure 6: Transcription Excerpt 3: Meg's Discursive Development

Mel: a. I think the contestants that managed to adapt to the two challenges always
b. ended up doing well
Meg: c. Do you feel like Miles adapted though?
d. **Because**, I **kind've** had a feeling that throughout the competition he
e. **kind've** used
f. **like** the skills, like the same kind...
Tod: g. He always managed to
Meg: h. [pull it off]
Tod: i. No, I mean, I think it's a testament to his
j. **uh**, **kind've** ability at artistic bullshitting more than his actual ability to
k. adapt.
l. He might create something that doesn't mash up with the challenge and
m. even though..
n. really, it had originated from him wanting to do something he wants to do.

In this excerpt, Meg manages to challenge (in line c.) Mel's position that adaption is rewarded by the judges and results in artist-contestants "doing well." Line d. begins with a discursive marker "because," signaling a support statement for her challenge, even though she hedges the intensity of this support by the inclusion of "kind've/kind of," a lexical phrasing that further dampens her position along with the presentation of her assertion as "a feeling." Her weak position and support statements that trail off in line f. allow Tod a turn-taking opportunity. When he takes it, Meg does manage to challenge his command of the floor by attempting to complete his sentence (line h.). But her pitch here is very soft and her tone is what I would classify as resigned, so it still leaves Tod with

the power of interpretive authority when his tone at line i. at "No" is a more consistent pitch and registers as confidence. He concludes the topic, assuming the authoritative "last word" regarding which qualities in an artist are valuable.

A small aside, one of the limitations that arose in the analysis of this material was the competing discursive sources of both the television show content and the art itself. For example, there were two constitutive processes occurring and working upon and being worked upon by television viewers and study participants. *Reading Television*, the seminal work by noted theorist John Fiske (1978) informs current television studies and suggests that television audiences have the capability to meet the influence of the "text" of television. This relationship runs counter to the theory that television viewing is a one-directional transaction between consumer and consumed content. Audiences could, Fiske argued, create meanings of their own outside the text, sometimes in opposition to the ideological implications within the text. Considering this, there were two communicative, constitutive processes at work in this research: (a) between the show as culturally constitutive object, and (b) the artwork represented in the show as culturally constitutive as well. Both these positions spoke to participants and the discourses that arose within the course of the pilot were discourses that play a role in the shaping of these cultural objects. Sometimes these iterative processes were conflated in the focus group interactions, but they were also confused and complicated meaning-making among participants.

As Meg's case shows, written post-episode responses would serve as an initial site for arguments later referenced, revisited, and renegotiated in group discussion. The pliability of participants' stance became an interesting speech act, whereby initial resistance or openness took a turn due to the influence of interactional context. Tod opened up the conversation on the shock art challenge:

Figure 7: Transcription Excerpt 4: Tod and Mel Exchange

Tod: a. I thought, overall, it raised some interesting points.
b. Uh, the idea of, you know, art that's shocking for the sake of being shocking. It doesn't have um, any further purpose
c. Other than to just shock the viewer.
d. And, I, uh, I didn't really like it.
e. that they were being set in charge of making shocking…
f. **because** it was **almost**, **kind've** artificial and **kind've** meaningless behind it.
Zoe: g. [yea--h]
Tod: h. Uh, and, I mean, for me that episode the pieces of art
i. they came out with were the least interesting.
j. And the ones who were successful—Abdi
k. um, were the ones who could put something deeper into it
…
Mel: l. I mean, like when you said the whole "art for the sake of being shocking" thing
m. It was very unnatural.
Tod: n. [mhmm]
Mel: o. **Sort've** like how each of the artists, **sort've** thought that way too
p. and all tried to..find the meaning?
Tod: q. [mmhm]
r. According to their personal feelings, **right**?
s. Things that shock them, in their own lives.

Here, Mel interactionally acquiesces to Tod's initial claims that shocking art (as a mandate or a challenge) is mutually exclusive from art that has meanings or messages. Instead, he rephrases Tod's position, choosing "unnatural" instead of "artificial" and

orienting his statements as questions towards Tod as the dominant speaker in lines o., p., and r. I have labeled these as questions based on pitch changes that took place at the end of each one. I am drawing from Schegloff's (1987, 1998) research on pitch peaks, which occur just prior to possible grammatical completion and display an imminent turn-ending. Mel's use of multiple pitch peaks signifies a structural opening in the discourse, but also an expressive meaning of asking for agreement and affirmation from Tod.

A development in this exchange between Tod and Mel takes place further on, when Tod returns to the shock art challenge in reference to Jaclyn's body of work:

Figure 8: Transcription Excerpt 5: Jaclyn's Art and Expansion of Interpretive Repertoires

Tod: a. Jacqueline's pieces were really smart.
b. I thought that the shocking one, the one she won, the challenge
c. she won where she had pictures of herself with..writing
d. I thought that was like really, really clever idea, and a really powerful idea.
e. And then I didn't..like it
f. maybe I found it a bit repulsive
g. Maybe I was at the point in the challenge.
Mel: h. I didn't like her paintings before she won
i. I, I don't think she won the challenge before?
Tod: j. The shocking challenge
Mel: k. [yea]
Tod: l. was episode four
Mel: m. [yea, episode four.]
Tod: n. [did she..?]
Mel: o. **I don't know**, but I remember not liking her piece at all.

Figure 8, cont.

p. She was very, **I mean**, when you think of making something that's very shocking

q. **you know**, nudity is very, it's very easy to resort to

r. Nudity is always shocking.

s. **And**, I feel that she didn't use

t. She, she barely used, **I mean**, she didn't use her nudity,

u. She could've done so much more with it.

v. Uh, with what she then did

w. it wasn't really, ah..shocking at all.

Tod: x. **I mean**, **I thought** the shocking part was, the vulnerability.

y. **Because, I mean, you know**

z. **you know**, using yourself as, **you know**, nude

a1. you're at your most vulnerable.

a2. And to have strangers come along and write whatever they want

a3. and to let everyone else see? That's terrifying.

Mel: a4. [yea, yea, that's true]

Tod: a5. So I thought it was a powerful piece.

Unlike the previous excerpt that discussed the same challenge, in this excerpt Mel exerted himself a little more and extended his opinion even though he ultimately pulled back from it. The lexicalized phrase, “I don’t know,” which has been used within the group session before as a hedging device, is used here much more literally to communicate that the previous back-and-forth between Mel and Tod is beside the point because of Mel’s very clear stance towards Jaclyn’s use of nudity in art (line o.). His claim also manages to add nuance to the argument about female nudity, making it less

about social taboo and more about a failure to fully use female nudity as a tool to shock (lines u.-w.). It sets up an interesting conflict between Jaclyn's role as an artist or a contestant if her nudity is a tool to accomplish the goals of the challenge. Tod would respond in supportive explication of his earlier point. In contrast to Mel, Tod's use of "you know/y'knw" would follow Schiffren's (1987) own research on "you know" as a discourse marker: "*Y'knw* has both expressive meaning (when a speaker asks for cooperation or attention in a discourse task) and potentially referential meaning" (p. 63). In his response to Mel, Tod's discursive hedging indicated perhaps a discomfort with the material (female nudity) or with an adamant defense of his position. Either way, the exchange did the work of complicating the role nudity can have in art, as an aspect that is at once traditional, easy to fall back on, vulnerable, powerful, meaningful and shocking. This interactional negotiation managed to expand the interpretive repertoires of all the participants in discussing works of art. Challenging additions to stagnant discourse (i.e., "shocking" to the characteristics and value of art) helped to expand participant's interpretive repertoires for discussing art's value, allowing them the space to adopt new positions, contest conventional ones, and negotiate the boundaries of what can and cannot be.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, themes that emerged from discourse analysis of the data sets included (a) Distancing and Nuanced Progression of Judgment, (b) Artist as Myth: Contestant vs Artist, and (c) Value and Meanings of Art. Discursive work within a focus group involved a certain degree of maneuvering for conversational power within the group dynamic. Modeling behavior (e.g., when the participants incorporated judges'

vocabulary) was initially useful to participants, but analysis found that they also used modeling to gain confidence in the subject matter, and once achieved they utilized the same lexicon as a tool to make their own opinions distinct.

In the case of discussion of a reality television show about contemporary art, participants grappled for conversational power and authorial position by reenacting pursuits of authenticity (Allen & Mendick, 2012; Rose & Wood, 2005). Authenticity and "reality," as an end goal for interactional exchange, is arrived at when participants reflect on their understanding of themselves and their cultural context (Ouellette & Hay, 2008). Likewise, challenging dominant cultural discourses of the artist as an archetype and what defines art were moments when existing cultural ideologies were identified and renegotiated within the conversation. It is when participants meet a conflict between predominant discourse (i.e., whether collaboration is a characteristic of an artist or a TV contestant and shock as a valuable feature of art or reality television content) and a challenging discourse presented through popular culture that they engage in meaning making and reflect upon their own experience in acts of identity work. Analysis found that the participants in this study, through this conflict and negotiation process of viewing this program and discussing it, socially constructed new meanings around contemporary art and artists.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This research functioned as an exploratory study examining perceptions of contemporary art and artists through the lens of emerging adult's discourse and identity work after viewing the reality television show, *Work of Art: The Next Great Artist*. Four participants communicated the social significance of this program and reflected their own perceptions of the artists through their discourse.

Returning to the research question of how portrayals of contemporary artists and art-making in reality television affect viewer perceptions of contemporary art and artists, I argue that this study produced significant evidence that a popular culture approach offers unique access to contemporary art's interpretability. The function of talk around *Work of Art* allowed participants to perform access to interpretive authority, providing a site for rich informal learning about contemporary art and artists.

Methodology and Data Collection

Qualitative analysis of surveys, individual and focus group interviews were completed utilizing discourse analysis as an analytical strategy. Using discourse analysis, the research data analyzed group language employed during conversation about the events and characters of each television episode to better understand how emerging adult viewers regard and position themselves discursively in relation to the narrative of the show and its portrayal of contemporary art and practice. Grounded theory, as a methodology, guided the process of seeking out patterns of interaction within session transcripts and building a theory on the function of emergent patterns within the interaction. Data analysis was triangulated between the developments and emergent categories that came from the email episode responses and the cumulative focus group

sessions (Creswell, 1998). By triangulating results from these divergent data collection sources, I was able to verify and confirm the developing hypothesis around discourses of contemporary art and artists. Triangulation and grounded theory, in addition to discourse analysis as an analytical strategy, enabled me to understand and examine some of the existing beliefs around contemporary art and artists as figures in an environment most closely aligned with informal exchange. The informal learning and conversation that underlies this study is important for art educators to recognize as a field, so that we might gain knowledge of the informative context that emerging adults bring to their learning experiences in the classroom, the museum, and locations outside these institutions.

PRIMARY RESULTS

The main results from this study were threefold. First, results pointed to a pattern of progressively nuanced insight and descriptive talk, indicated alternative access to art's interpretability through the lens of popular culture. Talk in the focus groups functioned as a way for participants to perform access to interpretive authority over subjects of contemporary art to varying degrees of success, whether that meant adopting art terminology or modeling the language of judges and artist-contestants. Participants *wanted* to gain a greater understanding of the content of work and the practice of artists. Modeling the talk of judges and artist-contestants provided participants greater flexibility in contesting the meanings of art and increased command over the content of contemporary art to solidify their own position within the group. These are two very distinct but unconscious tasks of talk within the focus groups. Participants both worked to negotiate meaning around contemporary art, reality TV, and artists, as well as working to strengthen their own conversational position—associated with access to interpretability

gained through social class distinction—throughout their discussions. There was a sense that those who could "see through" the low brow form of reality TV to its producer-intent, were also afforded a powerful conversational position. For instance, when Tod in Figure 5 made the distinction between "real" drama and the drama manufactured by "them" or the producers, editors, or any number of people who he has perceived as working behind the scenes to create this interpersonal drama artificially, he was solidifying a conversational position. The focus group talk progressed in more nuanced ways over the course of the study and were enacted within a debate meant to socially situate the meaning of art's value between communities of high and low taste distinctions.

Secondly, analysis displayed the discursive work involved in the meaning-making around understanding the artist as a figure, as a myth, and as a profession. Participants' interactional speech acts performed a balancing act between critically examining the competing discourses of the artist—as contestant and creative laborer—and an understanding of who they are and their own identity in relation to the character of the artist.

The third finding of the analysis involved the situated meaning of art and its value. Participants analyzed work as art, engaging a conversation about "good" and "bad" art to unfold instead of shutting down conversation by eliminating the possibility that what was under examination was not art at all. I would posit that conversations about what is and what was not art, conducted in more nuanced ways over the course of the research design, were reflective of critical engagement by the participants.

Over the course of the initial focus group session, participants called upon previously embedded notions of art's value being rooted in the value of its aesthetic appeal and artistic technique, but also upon its ability to summon emotional connection

from "deeper meaning" and symbolic message. But when confronted with a new possibility for what art could be (i.e., a tool to "shock" the viewer) participant talk exhibited more overlap and disagreement than in discussion of any other episode. The discourse of art—and its subsequent value as a notion that could take on new meanings without falling apart—was revisited and renegotiated over the course of the study. The pliability of participants' stance became an interesting speech act, whereby initial resistance or openness took a turn due to the influence of interactional context. Ultimately, analysis supported a view that emerging adult participants were willing to remain flexible and pliable in their discourse of art, enabling meaning to be penetrated and to expand. What becomes integral about this result is the fact that the context of discussing a popular culture form allowed for alternative access to art's unique site for critical examination. None of the debate was shut down due to a lack of knowledge or access to art's interpretability. Participants, if they could not model the words of judges or call upon previous knowledge, worked to understand and negotiate content through the constructs of reality television, all of which granted deeper engagement to every participant in the content and subject matter examined and discussed.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study served as an introduction to what I believe is a compelling new subfield of research on reality television for art educators. Popular culture, as exemplified by reality television in this study, gives us as educators and advocates for art education access to a rich source of knowledge about discourses of contemporary art and television. As an initial investigation into this area of study, it is my hope that this research will be expanded in the future to include quantitative measures, and a cultural studies analysis of

the television show content alongside a discourse analysis of a larger sample size. This small case study provides a starting point and one that still offers a unique perspective on how we, as a field, can best articulate art's unique role in education. This study only scratches the surface of looking into current publicly held ideologies around contemporary art and artists. These are the same ideologies that govern how art is discussed as objects and as a career, the kinds of shows that become popular in museums, and what gets funded in educational policy and in nonprofit art environments. As a field, we cannot afford to ignore popular culture-based, alternative approaches to the teaching of contemporary art. By employing a larger sample size and expanding the scope of the study, future researchers could work with class-sized focus groups of up to 12-20 students of diverse ages and backgrounds to better reflect the kinds of conversations happening in classrooms today. It might also be useful to explore this topic through a more gendered lens, with focus groups made up of all males or all females, to see if the discourses engaged diverge from heterogeneous groups. Research along these lines could also occur in different locations throughout the country, or even the globe, to see if cultural beliefs, regional characteristics, or degree of prior art knowledge come into play in the negotiation of discourses surrounding this program and perhaps others like it.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Within the field of art education, there has been little to no research into the knowledge afforded by discourses around popular culture, especially those specific to reality television, into how the public conceptualizes contemporary art and artists. This foundational knowledge into how contemporary art and practice is perceived is offered within this study. The discourse and dialogue that emerged from this study are the kinds

of engagements and conversations about contemporary art that we as art educators would like to see happen in classrooms, dorm rooms, coffee shops, and living rooms around the country. It is within conversations like this that we see contemporary art as being a participatory act, a fundamental engagement in our present world, and a critical examination of our role as educators in it. Popular culture shapes public opinion, which likewise, shapes media messages. It is these messages that do much to configure the lives of citizens, often in ways that are not considered fully and thoughtfully. This is our landscape of engagement. We as art educators have the tools and opportunity to help those around us to better understand contemporary art and the role it plays in our lives. More so, we have the opportunity to point the way to all that contemporary art can potentially offer to our lives. By being in tune with the moment—our political, social, and cultural present—contemporary art more easily engages with popular culture discourses because these are both constitutive, reflective, and presently-evolving cultural forms. It has so much to offer to the general public by way of critical approach to understanding our world. It becomes, then, a crucial task of art education to identify new and important avenues for richer exploration of those discourses in order to meaningfully connect contemporary art with a greater audience.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

IRB APPROVED ON: (ORS USE ONLY) ***EXPIRES ON:***

Title: Work of Art, The Next Great Artist: Teaching and Advocating for Reality TV in Visual Culture Curriculum

IRB PROTOCOL #

Conducted By: Lauren Macknight (214.797.9596); Sponsor: Dr. Paul Bolin, bolinp@austin.utexas.edu

Of The University of Texas at Austin: *Department of Art and Art History*

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The person in charge of this research will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to participate or stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can stop your participation at any time and your refusal will not impact current or future relationships with UT Austin or participating sites. To do so simply tell the researcher you wish to stop participation. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent for your records.

The purpose of this study is to conduct a case study using survey and qualitative interview methods of data gathering in order to identify the perceptions of contemporary artists and art-making through the viewing of reality-competition show "Work of Art: The Next Great Artist." Additionally, this research seeks to understand how viewers relate and contextualize themselves within the show's narrative. The data collected from the "Work of Art" research could provide art educators and media studies researchers with foundational research from which to explore further.

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:

- Fill out the following pre- and post-program survey and return to researcher.
- Participate in an interview with researcher directly following three episodes

Total estimated time to participate in study: For the survey, ten minutes. Fifteen minutes minimum for an interview over three sessions for a total of a minimum of forty-five minutes.

Risk: The risk of being associated with this study is no greater than everyday life.

- This research may involve risks that are currently unforeseeable. If you wish to discuss the information above or any other risks you may experience, you may ask questions now or call the Principal Investigator listed on the front page of this form.

Benefits: There are no benefits for participating in this study.

Compensation/ Cost: There will a small amount of compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:

- If you wish to participate in the survey but remain anonymous, please indicate so on the survey and not fill out the name segment.
- If at any point you wish to withdraw the information you gave to the researcher, please contact researcher to have the information removed and destroyed.
- Interviews conducted with the researcher will be audio recorded with your approval. To make possible future analysis the investigator will retain the recordings of the interviews.
- The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study.

The records of this study will be stored securely and kept confidential. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin, members of the Institutional Review Board, and (study sponsors, if any) have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject. Throughout the study, the researchers will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions about the study please ask now. If you have questions later, want additional information, or wish to withdraw your participation call the researchers conducting the study. Their names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses are at the top of this page.

If you would like to obtain information about the research study, have questions, concerns, complaints or wish to discuss problems about a research study with someone unaffiliated with the study, please contact the IRB Office at (512) 471-8871 or Jody Megsen, Ph.D., Chair, The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at (512) 232-2685. Anonymity, if desired, will be protected to the extent possible. As an alternative method of contact, an email may be sent to orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu or a letter sent to IRB Administrator, P.O. Box 7426, Mail Code A 3200, Austin, TX 78713.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B: "WORK OF ART": EMAIL SURVEY I QUESTIONS

Comments/ Concerns/ Questions in regards to survey;
email lam1003@gmail.com

If you would like your answers to remain anonymous; please **DO NOT** fill in name. I will use the answers to determine the quota assignment.

Name _____

Personal Questions:

1. What is your decided major at the University of Texas at Austin? (or anticipated major, if undecided)

_____

2. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being do not enjoy very much and 5 being enjoy very much) , how much do you enjoy art?
3. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being uncomfortable and 10 being confident), how comfortable do you feel talking about art with friends and family?
4. Do you create your own artwork? Have you previously?

_____

5. What are your hobbies?

_____

6. Do you like to watch television? Which programs?

_____

7. Approximately how many hours per week do you watch television?
8. From your experience, is the art you were taught in secondary school different then the art you believe is exhibited in contemporary galleries and/or museums?

_____

_____

_____

1. Please circle those you've visited in the recent past (within six months of survey)

   The Visual Arts Center

   Blanton Museum

   Austin Museum of Art

   Arthouse

   Other museum or gallery

   exhibit:_____

2. List three of your favorite artists.
3. List three contemporary artists.
4. Which mediums do you associate with contemporary art?

_____

APPENDIX C : "WORK OF ART": INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Did you take art classes in middle school? In high school? What do you remember from these courses?
2. Why, in the previous survey, did you mark that you felt more uncomfortable than confident discussing contemporary art with your peers and family?
3. How is the art exhibited in contemporary museums different from the art you were taught in school in your opinion?
4. What do you think it mean to be "contemporary" in art?
5. How would you describe contemporary art?
6. How would you describe contemporary artists?
7. How would you describe the process of art-making for contemporary artists?
8. Who in your life friends/family/mentors most influences your opinion of art? Why?
9. Which artists do you associate with contemporary art?
10. Have you ever thought of becoming an artist professionally? How come?

APPENDIX D: EMAILED INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE QUESTIONS
(to be completed after viewing each episode) for Selected TPQG Members

1. Do you think X deserved to win? Why or why not? (X being whomever was the decided winner of the latest episode).

_____

2. Why do you think Y person was eliminated? (Y being whomever was the decided eliminated contestant of the latest episode)

_____

3. Who would you have chosen to win? To be eliminated? Why?

_____

_____

4. If you were Y, what would you have done differently?

_____

APPENDIX E: INITIAL QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATORY FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Only for initial interview:

1. Who here watches reality television? It doesn't have to be *Work of Art*.
2. Which shows do you watch? Why do you like to watch them?
3. At what point would you stop watching a reality television series?

At each interview (IF lull is reached):

1. Overall, have you felt that the work exhibited was "art"?
2. Do you think you could recreate the art made?
3. In the last episode you watched, did everyone think the right person won?
4. If no, who should have won? Why should that person have won?
5. Has there been a previous episode when you didn't think the right person won? Which one, who should have won and why.
6. Did you agree with Y judge? Why or why not?
7. Do you think the contestants act like this in real life?
8. What kinds of themes, issues, or problems did the contestants engage in once they were given the parameters of the challenge? Do you think they were successful?
9. What kinds of skills do you think contestants need to win these challenges?
10. Why do you think they interview artists off screen? Why don't they interview judges?
11. Would you go see an exhibit from one of the artists on the show? Which one?

APPENDIX F: LIST OF EPISODES FROM *WORK OF ART* SEASON ONE
(summaries provided by Bravotv.com)

Episode 1: "Self-Reflexive"
AIRED: Jun 9 12/11c
"Bravo brings color to the creative competition landscape in a new series that assembles fourteen of the art world's most talented, up-and-coming artists where they will compete for a solo show at the Brooklyn Museum and a cash prize of $100,000. Equipped with self-portraits, the artists size up their competition and are randomly put into pairs for their first elimination challenge. They learn that after only one night together, their mission is to create a piece of art that captures the essence of a fellow competitor. Host and judge China Chow, alongside series judges Bill Powers, Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn, and Jerry Saltz, must determine who makes the cut and who is not 'The Next Great Artist.'"

Episode 2: "The Shape of Things to Come"
AIRED: Jun 16 12/11c
"For their second challenge, the artists are taken to an appliance graveyard filled with televisions, toaster ovens, and an array of broken electronics. Using the trash heap as their canvas, the artists are charged with transforming one man's trash into another man's piece of art. Renowned mix-media sculptor Jon Kessler joins the judging panel."

Episode 3: "Judging A Book By Its Cover"
AIRED: Jun 23 12/11c
"The contestants meet the President and Publisher from one of the largest book publishers in the world, who guides them through the impressive history of the marriage of art and literature. For their elimination challenge, the artists are charged with creating innovative cover art for a classic novel. Jonathan Santlofer, New York author and internationally recognized artist, sits on the judging panel to determine which winning

cover will be put into production and which artist will go home."

Episode 4: "A Shock to the System"
AIRED: Jun 30 12/11c
"The artists are challenged to create a piece that is shocking and memorable, and speaks to issues that are important to them personally. An originator of provocative and controversial imagery, acclaimed photographer Andres Serrano serves as guest judge."

Episode 5: "Art that Moves You"
AIRED: Jul 7 12/11c
"The contestants are given a fleet of cars and told to drive them through New York City, ultimately arriving at the Audi Forum. An artist's city often serves as a source of inspiration, and for their elimination challenge, the artists must create a piece of work that is reflective of their experience driving through the streets of Manhattan. Richard Phillips, known for his hyper-realistic paintings, serves as guest judge."

Episode 6: "Open to the Public"
AIRED: Jul 14 12/11c
"The remaining artists are challenged to create a large-scale, outdoor installation piece. The artists must put egos aside and collaborate effectively in order to create a public art masterpiece in just two days. The challenge culminates in a public viewing; complete with guest judge Yvonne Force Villareal, president and co-founder of the Art Production Fund."

Episode 7: "Child's Play"
AIRED: Jul 21 12/11c
"The artists find themselves in the Children's Museum of the Arts, filled with finger paint portraits and crayon collections. Their challenge is to create a work that is symbolic of the moment their artistic expression began, using only kid-friendly materials to create an

adult masterpiece. Will Cotton, an oil painter known for his surreal, childlike landscapes, serves as guest judge."

Episode 8: "Opposites Attract"
AIRED: Jul 28 12/11c
"The artists are paired and must create works about opposing forces: Heaven and Hell, Male and Female, Order and Chaos. New York artist notorious for his graphic paintings, Ryan McGinnes, sits on the judging panel."

Episode 9: "Natural Talents"
AIRED: Aug 4 12/11c
"The remaining four artists head out of bustling New York City to the quiet refuge of a nature preserve. Here, they are invited to draw inspiration from their surroundings – exploring the landscape and gathering natural materials to incorporate into their piece. Michele Oka Doner, who specializes in creating art based on nature, serves as guest judge."

Episode 10/Finale: "The Big Show"
AIRED: Aug 11 12/11c
"The final contestants have been sent home to prepare a full solo exhibition. Climaxing in a large-scale gala opening, the finalists present their collections to the judging panel to determine 'The Next Great Artist.'"

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